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*Elizabeth S. Hauke*  
*Landsman-*  
**THE GREATER GLORY**  
*July 1895-*  
**A STORY OF HIGH LIFE**

BY

**MAARTEN MAARTENS,**

AUTHOR OF "THE SIN OF JOOST AVELINGH," ETC.

*Jozua Marinus Willem van der Pooten*

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*Schwartz*  
    

**IN TWO VOLUMES.**

**VOL. I.**

**LEIPZIG**

**BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ**

**1894.**

KC 3874



*Anna Lindvall Munn*

**"So doth the Greater Glory dim the less."**

## N O T E.

---

HOLLAND is a small country, and it is difficult to step out in it without treading on somebody's toes. I therefore wish to declare, once for all, and most emphatically, that my books contain no allusions, covert or overt, to any real persons, living or dead. I am aware that great masters of fiction have thought fit to work from models; that method must therefore possess its advantages: it is not mine. In this latest book, for instance, I have purposely avoided correct description of the various Court Charges, lest anyone should seek for some feeble coincidence. Such search, after this statement, would be deliberately malicious. I describe manners and morals, not individual men.

I furthermore desire to say—although, surely, this should be superfluous—that the morals I seek to describe are those of the entire human race. It is only by the merest accident that my scene is laid in Hol-



land, a country whose inhabitants, I suppose, are no better, nor worse, than their neighbours. My common sense tells me they cannot be, though my widely-travelled heart insists, with sweet unreason, that the land of my birth is the best and happiest spot on the globe.

M. M.

TO  
WENDELA.



## THE ARGUMENT,

WHICH NONE NEED READ.

---

*She came to him—the Life of his Life, the Soul of his Soul—she came to him where he sat in the loneliness of the stately mansion, and she laid a gentle touch upon his bended head.*

*Where he sat in the loneliness of his grandeur, with hands close-pressed against throbbing eyeballs, pressed yet closer, to shut out that crimson flare which was eating away his heart.*

*Thus she found him staring wildly into darkness, staring beyond the darkness, into that void which is more horrible than death. “Come,” she said.*

*Then he lifted up his eyes in sluggish wonder. “Is it thou?” he whispered. “Art thou thou?”—and he*

*took up his burden, which was himself, and followed her.*

*She led him down into the great hall of mirth, from whence he had but newly crept away for weariness. The discordance of its tuneless music and its joyless laughter rolled up to meet them in their coming; yet of sight there was nought to welcome them, because that its myriad candles were grown suddenly dark.*

*Suddenly dark and unperceivable, had it not been that, as she passed before him, the light of her eyes shone forth with spreading splendour, and by its rays he marked in dumb amazement how that the great gold cups and chargers on the board were empty all, and lo and behold the guests sat naked, and their fair white flesh was covered with sores and they were not ashamed.*

*They were not ashamed, but rather did they clash together empty goblets and raise them to their lips and drink and sing. Ay, there was drinking from emptiness and from hollowness was merriment. A cold mist, white and slow, rose across the shadows, in a ring around the radiance of that starlit brow.*

*He stopped beside a woman fair of face to look upon, whose leprous arms were girt with bracelets, and a*

*serpent lay upon her breast. There was scorn in his sad eyes as he gazed upon her, and he broke into a fierce shout of laughter that beat down the tumult around.*

*But the woman stared back upon him as one that saw him not. In her gaze stood a sorrow, great and silent. None echoed his laugh; upon all that gay company a sudden hush was fallen. And his eyelids also were heavy with tears.*

*She—the Life of his Life, the Soul of his Soul—turned from where she was passing on before him. “Come forth,” she said, and resumed her way.*

*But, ere she approached the great portal, to which her hope was hastening, one that sat low down at the table stretched out his naked arm and barred her path. “Thou art ill-favoured,” he cried, “and strange to look upon. Tell thy name ere thou go.”*

*Serene, she drew herself up to all her lofty stature. “I have many names,” she answered him, “but none for such as thou. To thee let me be known for ever as an evil angel of God.”*

*He dropped his arm with an oath and lifted one of the empty cups and seemed to drain it. And some that sat near cried shame—upon her.*

*Then fled they forth, these twain—he and she—into the far country, and when the stillness had enfolded them as a garment, she drew down his head upon her breast. “It was thy mother,” she whispered gravely, as one chides a child that is sorry.*

*“My mother?” he replied, “I have never known her, if so be that she and I have met. Nothing have I known beyond the lap that bare me and the breasts that never gave me suck.”*

*Then went they on in silence, these twain—he and she—rising swiftly into the soft night-air, sweeping forwards past many a solitary house and quiet hamlet and wide-spread village, over the drowsy fields, oppressed with corn and cattle, over the restless forests, that never cease conversing in their sleep. All the beautiful world, of which men know so little, lay beneath them, shrouded in darkness, and, above them, circled in light, lay the beautiful worlds of which men know nothing at all.*

*They arrested their flight and hung over the great city. It glowed in the abyss, a red blot through the night.*

*“Look down,” she said. And he obeyed her. For one brief moment he obeyed her; then he shuddered away.*

*"I cannot," he gasped. She smiled upon him, with a smile of trustful pity. "Look down," she repeated, and there was command in her voice.*

*And again he obeyed her. And a great silence lay between them for many moments. Then he spoke:*

*"It is most horrible," he murmured. "It is strangely, sadly beautiful. I would gaze for ever thus, but that my sight is failing me——Dearest, I thank Heaven that I am blind."*

*And she led him far away into the desert—into the place where no man cometh except she guide him thither. On the brink of that vast precipice they stood and waited, and he felt that destruction yawned below.*

*"Leap!" she said, and let fall his hand. Then, as he lost her hold, the truth rushed back upon him that he was but a man, a child of earth, and that wings are given to angels only.*

*And he leaped.*

*But as he fell away into space, he realized suddenly that there was no more falling, no height, nor depth, nor distance. There was nothing but the small round earth outside him, and around him God.*

*And he lay silent in the immeasurable heaven.*



*"It is a meteor!" said the people, gathered to behold.  
"How brilliantly it shines! But why?"*

*And no one could give them answer, for the Angel  
of God was dead.*

*This is not an allegory. It is simply the whole  
simple story. They who will may read it. But you and  
I, we cannot understand it rightly, because the Angel of  
God is dead.*

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# THE GREATER GLORY.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### RINGS THE DEPARTURE-BELL.

THIS is a true story. It is what they call a story of high life. It is also a story of the life which is higher still.

There be climbings which ascend to depths of infamy; there be also—God is merciful!—most infamous fallings into heaven. The wise men, who explain this world, have taught us to consider it a round one; doubtless they have wisely measured it. Then, as 't is round, should wisdom twist it topsy-turvy no one would be a whit the wiser, not even the wise men. And that, perhaps, is why—sometimes—to fools—our earthly high and low seem but a mighty matter of tweedledum and tweedledee.

Fortune, the blind old hag, in her seat by the hearth, grins down vacantly at the wise men, whom she twiddles on her thumbs—like the fools. Like the fools, they go

rising and sinking, rising and sinking, till, one after another, all drop away into the fire. That, at any rate, is the end. We drop away into the fire.

Yet never a traveller paused by the roadside to look back, in weariness or wonderment, but understood, if the valley spread wider, that his path leads him up. So be it. Presently, on the other side, the road slopes down again into another valley. But what matter the ups and downs of the journey to the traveller if his face be set firmly towards the goal? Only he feels that descent is strangely easy, and wonders why God bade him climb.

We say that the steadfast sun rises and sinks, like us. We see him do it; such mysterious eyes are ours. Yet we know that it is otherwise. We, who know so little.

In earth's tiny circle revolve earth's little high and low. God's high is a steadfast point. It is here: in the centre of this strange thing you do not understand, this thing you call yourself, the divinely-human heart.

Mine is a true story. It is a story of high life as they call it. It is also a story of the life which is highest of all.

A moment's patience! We shall be coming to the funny part presently. Is it my fault if the comedy begins at the wrong end? So much the better for the other end, the right.

---

The departure-bell clangs suddenly upon the silence. A score of drowsy figures creep forth from twilight

corners into the radiance of a clear October afternoon.

"Yes, it was on the 6th of October that the old Belgian came to Deynum. My birthday, as it happens, my fifteenth birthday. Or was it the fourteenth, Wendela?

From where she sits by the window, in the fading summer sunset, mending one of Baby Gertrude's socks, Wendela tells me that she herself was twelve years old at the time. Then it must have been my fourteenth birthday, dearest. Yet what does the trifling date concern us? It is all so long ago, but that it is to-day.

On that sixth of October, then, somewhere towards the first sink of the sun down a white-blue autumn sky, a hackney-cab drew up, with a farewell rattle, in front of an outlying Amsterdam railway-station, away on the desolate dyke. The silver daylight rested cold upon the wooden shed, upon the great grey square, with its solitary kiosque, upon the dull expanse of water beyond. Across the loneliness a cruel little wind came persistently blowing. Inside the building a sudden bell rang out, with the very insolence of noise.

"This is not enough, sir," said the cabman. He said it gently, for the Dutch remain calm under injustice.

The old gentleman who had alighted from the vehicle continued his stolid ascent of the station-steps. His servant, preparing to follow, paused on the pavement, in a confusion of wraps and traps. It was the servant who had proffered the offending coin.

A Dutch railway-station is a scene of unruffled repose, inside and out. Half a dozen porters, in white

blouses and brass badges, leant immovable by the entrance, sleepily perceptive. The platform-bell stopped with a jerk, and in the stillness of the square the solitary cab stood out against its own clear shadow, with its cab-like air of sudden collapse.

"Not enough," repeated the driver, without raising his voice. The Dutch are as obstinate as they are gentle. He held up the half-florin he had received, between greasy finger and thumb, in the face of Heaven and the half a dozen porters.

"No, mynheer, it is not enough," chimed in the youngest of the porters. The elder five said nothing; they understood that information from a porter should never be gratuitous.

The valet cast a timid scowl after the receding figure of his master. Then, motioning back all slow offers of assistance, and balancing his load of luggage as best he might, he laboriously extracted a whole florin from a little black velvet purse and handed it to the cabman. The purse, with its fat embroidered cross, looked queerly suggestive of an undersized offertory-bag.

"Thank you," said the cabman, almost audibly, as he drove off. He did not say: "This is more than enough." He was only a human cabman.

"Ten per cent.," muttered the servant, in French, and hurried away into the station. The white porters stared passively in front of them. They could understand neither the too little nor the too much.

The old gentleman, meanwhile, had progressed straight across the entrance-hall. There was a con-

venient passage to the platform here, which officialism had reserved for luggage. Sub-officialism called out.

The stranger pointed a careless cane in the direction where his servant might have been. He was a distinguished-looking man, tall and straight, well oiled and well brushed, with a magnificent white moustache, and superlatively clad in a light-yellow ulster, such as young fellows wore in those days.

"A prince," said one guard, by the gate, in an awe-struck growl.

"Pshaw," grumbled his comrade, a bilious man without any predilections. "Prince or Pope, he had no right to pass through here; barring he had been a portmanteau, which he wasn't."

"Perhaps he was an Englishman," said the first guard. "Englishmen may do whatever they like. And they do it."

The object of their unwilling admiration turned neither to right nor left. His movements were those of a man in a trance. His eyes were set in that glassy stare which sees nothing that is near.

A line of empty carriages was drawn up along the platform, waiting. He got into one of them, and closed the door. A silver-braided somebody sprang forward and opened it again. The old gentleman awoke to the action, and flushed.

At that moment the station-bell rang out afresh. "On sonne le départ," he said aloud. "Eh bien, I am ready to go. But not thus, great God! Not *thus*." And large beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

The deserted platform now began rapidly to fill. Little groups went wandering by, with bags and bundles;



a bright provincial dress shone out from time to time among the shoddy waterproofs. Presently a scrubby, shabby individual slipped into the compartment, an open paper of grapes in his hand.

The stranger passed out and wrenched open the first door within his reach. But once more a conductor interposed. "This compartment is reserved, Monsieur, in case any of the directors——"

"It is the only one takable and I take it," replied the old gentleman, still in French. "Antoine," he turned fiercely upon his valet, who had just succeeded in finding him, "you blockhead, where are you? Pay for all the places, and see that they leave me in peace."

"If Monsieur would but inform me where it is his intention to betake himself——" began the valet, with a slight stutter over the word "Monsieur."

The old man hesitated on the carriage-step. "Get your tickets," he burst out, with unreasoning fierceness, "as far as the train goes. And see that they leave me in peace."

No further molestation was offered him. At a few hurried words from the frightened valet, the protesting officials fell back, with discreet glances of half-vexed curiosity. "These great personages!" said the inspector, shrugging his shoulders, and with his own hand he brought a card, marked "Engaged."

"This is not for Belgium? This train?" asked the old man, rousing himself.

"Certainly not, your Highness. The Belgian train does not leave till 6.40. This one is just starting. Might I ask——"

"My valet! My valet will tell you," replied the

old man, with a repellant gesture. "Morbleu, cannot you leave me in peace?"

They bustled in Antoine, still fumbling his change, and expostulating with everybody. Another moment and the train was off.

"I have tickets to the frontier, Monsieur le Marquis."

The old man took no notice. His face, under its careful make-up, was hideous with the horror of his thoughts.

The valet remained standing at the farther end of the railway-carriage, steadying himself against the side with an air of respectful indifference. Presently he drew a couple of small note-books from his pocket, and began scribbling assiduously in them. One especially appeared to claim much of his attention; it was lettered "Debtor and Creditor" in dull gold.

The train ran on swiftly through the ashen twilight. All around, the flat country lay brown and bleak. Not a sound disturbed the listening silence, except once when the old man broke into a shuddering groan. The valet looked up quickly, then down again, and went on with his scribbling.

"Listen," said the Marquis at last, abruptly, speaking as if he dreaded equally both silence and speech, "I may as well tell someone. I am dying."

A long stillness. "I am dying—hein?"

"I regret it sincerely for Monsieur le Marquis."

"Ha, polisson, you will regret it for yourself." Having once cast forth his secret, the sick man seemed to find relief in abuse of his companion. He heaped up angry words for some moments longer. The valet stood

silent, ticking his pencil against the cover of his pocket-book. And the train ran smoothly on.

"You will gain nothing by my death. Do you understand?"

"I have always understood that perfectly, Monsieur le Marquis." And the train ran smoothly on.

Then a station was reached. During the long halt that ensued a number of inquisitive glances were attracted by the label in the window, a most unusual sight in Holland. People lingered near, a-tiptoe, peering. The valet stared back insolently, screening his master.

When the train was once more rushing forward, away among the fields, the Marquis resumed, with his eyes on the window beside him: "At least you might have asked how long."

"As it pleases Monsieur le Marquis," said the valet.

Again a heavy pause. And, beneath the deepening shadows, an increasing sense of chill. Miles upon miles of quiet meadows and monotonous cattle. The Marquis did not see them as he gazed. He saw nothing but that death-warrant he had heard an hour ago, writ large across the steadfast heavens. And the weight of his solitude became unbearable to him.

"That cabman?" he began anew. "Did you pay him more than his proper fare?"

"No, Monsieur le Marquis," said the valet.

"It is good. I should have deducted the sum from your wages."

"So I told myself, Monsieur le Marquis."

But Antoine smiled softly, as he fingered the little account-book in his pocket. And he breathed on the

pane before him, and wrote "ten per cent." across it with his finger, and gently rubbed the letters out, as the smooth train flew on.

He did not look round again until a quick succession of gasps attracted his calm attention. Even then he did not turn immediately. He was hardly an evil man. He was only a menial. What sympathy of sorrow should he dare to have in common with his arrogant lord?

The Marquis was lying back, faintly struggling with the tightness of his collar and cravat. His features seemed wrenched awry in the violence of his pain. "We must stop," he whispered, "at the next station. I can go no farther. Stop!"

The valet drew near, helplessly striving to help. "But where then——?" he began, and checked himself.

"Where? Does it matter?" — the sufferer's voice rose to a momentary scream and immediately died down again. "Anywhere. Only stop."

They remained facing each other in the long grey sunset, the servant uncertain, annoyed, swaying to and fro in the continuous motion; the master crushed down among his foppish finery, vainly hoping to beat back the fierce flame from his breast.

At last the engine slackened its pace, and drew up with a thud. Antoine thrust his head out into the sudden hush. An open shed stood forlorn, amid the shadow-smitten landscape, by the glistening rails.

"This is a station—this? A village?" cried the valet.

"Jawel, Mynheer," replied a voice.

"Quick!" murmured the Marquis; "open the door. Quick. Before they start again!"

The valet still delayed for a moment, with his hand nervously trying the lock. "And the name?" he called.

The guard came running up in astonishment. "You are mistaken!" he cried. "This is nothing. This is Deynum."

The old man started slightly as the name reached his ears. "Deynum," he repeated; "of all places! That decides it." He stumbled to his feet. "Deynum! That must mean little Reinout. Here or anywhere. And what does it matter where, when the final summons comes!"

The shrill station-bell rang out its sudden warning across the listening fields.

---

## CHAPTER II.

## YOUNG REINOUT.

"REINOUT!"

Count Hilarius went across to the window and called to his son. It was a dull, sombre-curtained window, opening out upon the long, dull city-garden of a dull house at the Hague. The room was a "study," so-named from the directories and Government almanacks which slept, uncut, on their shelves, against the wall.

Count Hilarius smoothed his fair moustache, and a flush played across his cheeks. He cast a gratified look at his reflection in the window-pane, and a still more delighted one down on the document in his hand.

"Reinout! Come here immediately. I have something to tell you. Something you will like to hear."

The boy in the distance, who had been stooping over a rabbit-hutch, turned in hasty obedience to this reiterated summons and came running towards the house. As he ran, he continued to fondle a cumbersome black bunny, which hung, jammed up most miserably against his jacket, incessantly twitching its little pink nose.

"I couldn't come at once, Papa," he shouted. "This

animal had got its paw caught in the netting, and I had to unfasten it. Poor beastie. Poor beastie." He squeezed the rabbit energetically. "I hate rabbits all the same," he added. "I shall give mine away on my birthday. Greedy creatures. They're no good to nobody but themselves."

"And a very wise philosophy," replied his father, laughing. "Look here, Reinout; something very important has happened. You're too young to understand about it rightly. Still, you can easily see that I am pleased."

"I shall be fourteen next week, Papa," said Reinout. Then a sudden burst of flame came pouring across his southern eyes. "Are we to go back to Brazil?" he asked. And dropped his rabbit.

"Far better than that——" the boy made a dash at the skipping, crouching quadruped—"We shall never leave Holland again. For here, in my hand——" Count Hilarius's voice and countenance dropped in solemn unison—"I hold my nomination to the Royal Household. Child, your father will henceforward spend much of his time in attendance on the King."

He called out the final words, somewhat crossly, after his retreating offspring. But Reinout leaped back at a bound.

"Oh how splendid!" said Reinout.

The Count smiled a complacent little smile.

"Monsieur de Souza always says," continued the boy enthusiastically, [he was quoting his tutor,] "that that's what *I* must do when I grow up. Serve the King! There's nothing else worth doing in these days, he says. And you remember, the King can do no

wrong, Papa. So he will always be able to tell you exactly what is right."

"Child, how stupidly you sometimes talk. I am not to be Prime Minister, thank Goodness. I am appointed one of the Lords Sub-Comptrollers of the Household. There; that is what you can tell your playmates. A Lord Sub-Comptroller of the Household. There are two of them. It sounds rather nice; does it not?"

And he walked away from the window, pleasantly lingering over the delightful words. Then, with one of the quick twists peculiar to his nervous figure—Count Hilarius was never more irritable than when gratified—he turned to say sharply:

"Don't talk nonsense about Brazil. You would like to live out in the country—wouldn't you?—here in Holland, in a beautiful Castle with parks and pleasure-grounds, quite different from this poky bit of garden, where you could have dogs, and a pony, and lots of other pets?"

"Oh a pony!" cried the son, not hearing the rest. "Are you going to give me a pony for my birthday? I don't want any other dog than Prince."

"No, not just yet. But if ever I get——Deynum, you shall have one. There, run away now. I have letters to write."

"To Mamma?" asked the boy.

"Amongst others. Why do you ask? Do you want me to tell her to come back?"

"No; it is not that. I was thinking she would like to hear that Prince's leg is well again."

"Oh, rubbish. You had better write to her yourself."



"I?" said the boy. "Why?" And he ran away—he always either ran or crawled—with the rabbit against his cheek, overflowing his shoulders.

At the farther end of his dusty playground he stopped abruptly. "How splendid!" he repeated, and then he sat down on the bench by the single apple-tree, to think it out.

The news had overwhelmed him, little eighteenth-century royalist that he was. Of the strange education which his parents had decreed should be his, more anon; suffice it to say at present that its central idea had been the pomp and majesties of the Crown and its dependent Coronets, the glory of the Sun and of the Stars. "Make a gentleman of him, not a scholar," his father had said to the old Chevalier de Souza. And with Count van Rexelaer a gentleman meant a man of the world.

"Tell your playmates." Reinout reflected. Boy-friends—chums—he had none. Away in Petropolis, where his father had helped, in a small way, to represent the Court of the Netherlands, his child-life had been one of absolute lordship among a confusion of servants and animals, with Monsieur de Souza ever ready to instruct him how to use, without abusing, his birth-right of supremacy. And during the succeeding half-dozen years at the Hague—school being forbidden by the ex-diplomat's theories—although he had certainly come into contact with a number of his equals, at fencing-classes, dancing-classes, riding-schools, etc., the barrier of his isolation had always been maintained. "Seek acquaintances and avoid friends," was one of

his father's favourite sayings. "You want stepping-stones, not stumbling-blocks. I have known a man ruined for life by one friend."

Reinout, then, was steered clear of all compromising connections, high or low. "But I may give my old rocking-horse to the coachman's children?" And white-headed Monsieur de Souza smiled down fondly on his impetuous pupil: "Most certainly, mon petit, you must always be very gracious to the coachman's children." But that was long ago.

Reinout got off the seat again. "Prince," he called out, "Prince!" He was not intending to whisper his story to the dog, he was too old for that; but in all moments of superabundant feeling our thoughts most naturally flow out to whatever we love best. The dog did not make his appearance, however, and Reinout, after referring to his watch to make the agreeable discovery that lessons were still distant, sank back dreamily, letting the massive gold time-keeper fall loose in his lap.

With this treasure, too costly an one for his age, was connected the sole eventful episode of his dignified young existence. He loved to recall it. He loved the watch next best after Prince, because Prince was alive. But then so, to some indistinct extent, was the watch.

The first summer after the return from South America had been spent at the Belgian sea-side resort of Blankenberghe. On one broiling July afternoon, when his more reasonable elders were dozing, Reinout, impervious to heat as only children can be, had slipped out for a good run with his hoop, beneath the blazing

firmament, along a quiet, dusty lane. He had progressed for a long distance, in warmth and loneliness, when suddenly a turn of the road had brought him face to face with a swiftly advancing rider. The start, and an unexpected slope of the ground, had caused him to lose control over his bounding toy, and he saw it, a few yards in front, making straight for the horse's legs. In one flash he had realized the danger to the rider and had flung himself after it, with set teeth, straining beyond his strength. Then had come a terrible rush of two seconds, a whirlwind of sand, and a great crash of thunder, as he fell aside and rolled over with the hoop in his arms. After the first moment of dazzlement, he had awakened to the fact that the horseman had drawn rein beside him, an old gentleman, high and haughty, on a magnificent charger, in a halo of dust.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I am very sorry," said Reinout, sitting up.

Of these words the old gentleman took no immediate notice. "Why did you throw yourself under my horse's feet?" he asked.

"The hoop, Monsieur. I had to stop it. I couldn't —. I am very sorry."

"Of course. Most children would have stood and stared. Do you always know your duty and"—with an amused smile—"risk your life in doing it?"

No answer but a puzzled look.

"Where do you come from, little fool? What is your name?"

"From Brazil, Monsieur. Reinout van Rexelaer. I mean I am a Hollander. I am very sorry."

The horse gave a plunge for which, this time, Reinout was in no wise responsible. "You are a brave boy," said the rider presently. "It is good you are a small one, for I jumped you as you fell. So your name, of all others, is Rexelaer."

"Yes, Monsieur," acquiesced Reinout; "but if you please, I did not do it on purpose."

The stranger sat looking down upon him for a moment. Then he said thoughtfully:

"I wonder—never mind. Here, catch hold! As a memento of our meeting. And remember: 'A gentilhomme devoir fait loi.' Good-bye."

Reinout remained alone in the road, still seated on his hoop, white and shabby, the beautiful watch in his lap.

"What a lie I gave him to remember me by," reflected the stranger, as he rode rapidly away. "Well, these lies are the pillars of society. A fine fellow, though I was foolish to give him my watch. Of course it is her child. The world is positively becoming too small to turn round in. I shall go back to Saint Leu to-night."

Reinout had kept his present, for—somewhat to his father's vexation—no effort had been successful in discovering the donor. By a storm of tears he had even extorted permission to wear it daily. He was immensely proud of it. And of the grand old gentleman, his mysterious acquaintance. And of: "A gentilhomme devoir fait loi."

Count Hilarius had finished his letters, and was re-perusing the last. It was addressed to his Countess,

at Spa, whither she had betaken herself for a course of the waters, the state of her nerves not permitting her son to accompany her. His father was willing enough for him to remain. In his own manner, and for his own ambitious reasons, Count van Rexelaer was deeply attached to his only child and heir.

"Now, more earnestly than hitherto"—the Count had written—"I shall make every effort with regard to Deynum. I *must* succeed. It has been the principal object of my life, as you know, and, at last, after all these years of economy, there is money enough." "By-the-bye!" remarked Count Hilarius, when he came to this passage, and he rose and rang the bell. "Go to the Hotel des Etrangers, if you please, and ask whether Mynheer Strum, if he be in, could call in the course of the evening."

"To the hotel—I beg your pardon, sir?" said the man.

"I will write down the name for you; that will be better," replied his master suavely. And he did so, and then he added a postscript to the Spa letter: "At this moment I have a better chance than ever of acquiring Deynum." Then he stopped. "Pooh; she doesn't care as I do. How could she?" he said. His son's voice came wafted to him from the garden. And he smiled.

Ten minutes later he himself was on his way to the place whither he had despatched his servant. He found the man waiting in the hotel-entry. "No use delaying till this evening," he said half-apologetically. And the servant, knowing his master, touched his cap and departed.

Mynheer Strum was in his room, a hotel-bedroom on the top-floor. "If Mynheer would enter the reading-room;" but Mynheer preferred to go up. The stairs were dark, and the apartment was modest, as befitted its temporary occupant, a young country-notary who had just succeeded to his father's practice. This personage, as his visitor entered, rose lingeringly from the bed upon which he had been lounging, a big, ungainly creature, with red hair, red hands, and red, spectacled eyes, his whole frame-work suggestive of bones out of place.

"I am Count Rexelaer, upon whom you called a week ago——" began the ex-diplomat.

"I remember," interrupted the Notary. "Take a seat, Mynheer the Count," and he pushed forward the one unencumbered chair, without any effort to tidy the others, as he propped himself up against the side of the bed.

"I was too much occupied with other important matters at the time to give your communication due consideration. Since then I have studied it more closely. I shall instruct my Notary to write to Baron Rexelaer, as you propose."

"Do," said the Notary, cracking his prominent knuckles. A youthful habit which his fond mother had never even observed.

Count Rexelaer's face showed a little surprise, no vexation. "If I understand the matter rightly," he continued, "you are acting in Baron van Rexelaer's interest?"

"No, Mynheer."

"But, surely, though I am sincerely obliged to you——"

"I am acting in nobody's particular interest, not even my own. As it happens, they all coincide."

"Still, I can easily conceive that the Notary of Deynum must regard the lord of the manor—my cousin, if I may so venture to call him—with feelings of peculiar—peculiar——"

"Do not say 'obligation,' Mynheer," interposed the other irritably. "I owe Mynheer your Cousin——" a sneer flashed through the last two words—"nothing beyond the deference due to his position. Me he owes—thanks to my father's good-nature—a very long bill. Please do not misunderstand me. I have nothing against the family at Deynum. On the contrary, a man does not easily break loose from his earliest prejudices, and I feel for the Baron at the Castle a good deal of what my parents have taught me to feel. I wish him well. I heartily wish to assist him. And that is why I came to—you."

There was a world of youthful arrogance in his words. Count Rexelaer rose, smiling. "Quite so," he said. "Well, I shall have the letter forwarded immediately. And I trust you to advise Baron Rexelaer for the best." He had caught the sneer; he did not again speak of "my cousin." But he smiled again.

"For the best," repeated Strum, "most certainly. Which is also your best, Mynheer the Count, as I hope you will remember later on." He got away from the bed and went, as an afterthought, to open the door for his visitor. "I must congratulate your Excellency," he

said in his awkwardest manner "on the result of your preoccupation of last week."

"How do you know?" asked Count Rexelaer, stopping, in genuine surprise, on the little landing.

"I heard it talked of at the 'White' Club."

"Ah, you go there?"

"Only on business. I hate such places. My stay here is over, and I return to Deynum to-night."

"Indeed? Then I was fortunate. Bon voyage."

"I thank your Excellency."

"Not Excellency." Count Hilarius paused again, this time in the dim light of the ladder-like staircase. "That is altogether a different thing. Allow me to explain. Excellency is a title reserved for the very highest charges only. I am appointed a Lord Comptroller of the Household. There are two. But they have by no means the title of Excellency."

"I am infinitely obliged to you for the information, Mynheer the Count," replied Strum; and then he closed his door. "I did not tell him *how* they talked of it," he thought. And then he mimicked the Count's manner. "Allow me to explain. I am appointed a Lord Comptroller of the Household. Bah, what a fool my father was! And how one learns to despise them all."

Count Rexelaer, meanwhile, went skipping blithely home. "So it is talked of already," he told himself. "Everywhere. And this foolish fellow called me 'Excellency.' Ah well, excelsior! Some day the greater glory will outshine the less. Who used to say that, by-the-bye?"



Oh, old Sir Percy Skefton at Rio. I suppose it was a quotation from somebody."

A few days later Baron Rexelaer van Deynum, who, by-the-bye, was in no way related to his namesake, the Count, received a letter from the Hague. He frowned over it, and crumpled it, and crushed it away in his pocket. And there he remembered it.

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## CHAPTER III.

## DEYNUM.

ON the evening which brought the Marquis to Deynum, Baron Rexelaer had been down to the village. "Good-evening, Landheer,"\* said a peasant, touching his cap.

The old Baron did not hear. He walked slowly, stooping forward, and his hands, which held a paper, were folded behind his back. He was a man nearer sixty than fifty, old-fashioned in appearance and apparel, a man of clear-cut features, which had been still further sharpened by the delicate chisel of Care.

The peasant, an old man also, turned to stare after his master with leisurely surprise. Then he shook his head lengthily as he resumed his slouching way.

The road was a long one. It came creeping down, white and thin, from the wooded hillocks against the dim horizon, and stretched itself, as one that takes possession, right across many miles of purple heath; then it broadened out, straight and hard, past the village, and curled away into nothing among the distant trees of the park.

The village lay, trim and prosperous, red-roofed

\* Lord of the Soil, equivalent to Laird.

and green-shuttered, in two rows, behind equal strips of narrow garden, on each side of the road. These patches of ground, though chiefly devoted to cabbages and cauliflowers, shone bright here and there in great splotches of crimson and violet. The gardens were silent. The cottages were silent. Only, occasionally, some humble figure, in white cap and print-gown, would come running out from a half-open door, and hurry round to the back with a pail or a platter. On a small green, over which the church rose gaunt and bare, a little knot of urchins cowered, chatting sedately. They stumbled to their feet, in a languid manner, as the lord of the land went by, and jerked their caps in half a dozen varied postures of clumsiness.

He had not noticed them. Yet, at this point, he paused, and, slowly turning, took a deliberate survey of the village, from the windmill which stands at the entrance, like a towering sentinel, its great brown sails becalmed upon the pale blue air, to the little low-thatched cottage, asleep at the farther end, against the park-enclosure—the lame cobbler's cottage, which looks, in its deep-sunk humility, as if it had pulled the roof over its eyes for shame.

It was very short and thin, this village. And around it heath and woods spread very far and wide. An ashen dulness fell slowly settling upon all things, such as follows when the shadows lengthen over the deep gold of a sunlit autumn day. A chill little wind, from nowhere, began flattening out the soft air.

"My village," said the old lord's thoughts; and the paper crackled between his nervous hands. All

Deynum was his. It was little Deynum. To him it was neither big nor little. It was all Deynum.

Beyond the village, as has been already said, the road led away into the castle-grounds. You found yourself suddenly among the tall trees, on both sides, in the half-light shaded and solemn. A moment ago you could still have seen them rising, from the flat fields all around, in a great bouquet of rounded verdure, like an offering from earth to her Maker. The park was not large, compared with many others, but its wide-spreading oaks and beeches were reckoned among the oldest in Holland. It was open to the public road, excepting for a deep, dry ditch alongside, and presently you happened upon the avenue, which, without lodge or gate or even stone of warning, stretched broad and stately from before your sight to a dark-brown spot in the distance—the house. The owner of the place—for as such the world still regarded him—turned gently in the direction of home. It was colder here, under the great trees. He shivered slightly.

A pretty peasant-girl, bright and healthy, with a face of "milk and blood," came tripping down a side-path. "Good-evening, Landheer," she said. But she also got no answer; she threw up her dainty nose indignantly, and repeated the words in a higher key. The old gentleman started, and coloured over his thin cheeks.

"Good-even, good-even, Lise!" he said hurriedly, recalling now the words he had at first ignored. "I had not noticed you; I am sorry for it. You look prettier than ever, little maid. How goes it with the bridegroom?"

"The bridegroom is well enough, Mynheer the Baron," replied the girl, laughing. "Were his pockets as full as his cheeks, there would be no cause to delay the wedding."

"Many things would be easier, girl," said the old man musingly, "did purses not run dry."

"But we hope, nevertheless, to trouble Father Bulbius before St. John comes round again." The girl had the privilege of her good looks, and she used it. "Perhaps your Worship will deign to dance at the wedding," she said.

"Yes, yes," the Baron gave hasty answer; "good-even, my child! Tell your father I have spoken to the bailiff. He can have that stroke of land he asked for. Good-bye!" and he resumed his thoughtful walk. "Dance," he repeated; "the very word, forsooth. Other dolls will be set a-dancing,\* before that time comes round."

He struck aside—half-way down the avenue—into an alley of soaring chestnuts, broadest green, with an occasional dab of golden orange, as if an early imp of autumnal mischief had frolicked along the trees. At the farther end of this alley—"the Holy Walk," they call it—hidden away in the leafy silence of the woods—sleeps a small grey chapel, ivy-covered, fern-surrounded, an almost perfect bit of early Gothic, fairly well-preserved.

Its oaken door stood ajar; the old Baron pushed softly through, from the ashen calm of the park into the dusky repose of the sanctuary.

A little greystone chapel, with half a dozen stained-

\* Dutch idiom.

glass windows, a chapel of the dead, every available space upon its narrow floor and walls heaped up with monumental records in marble, metal or wood. A Roman Catholic chapel, as shown by its ornamented altar, which bore an ivory crucifix and two vases of pale-white roses, pure and fragrant. Over the altar, amidst a blaze of colour, and furthermore, in corners and cornices, on monuments and praying-stools,—or and argent upon a field of sinople, protruding one above the other from either side of the shield,—the two lions' paws with uplifted swords, the Coat of the Rexelaers. And under the Coat the motto: *Ipsa gloriator infamia*. I glory in my shame.

Stumbling forward in the heavy twilight, the old noble sank down reverently at the altar-steps. He buried his face in his hands, which still held the crumpled paper, and his cheeks moved nervously, in the silence of his prayer. It was all very peaceful and hushed, but for a faint soughing, from time to time, in the trees. A squirrel peeped in for a moment, with bright, inquisitive eye, and then scampered away in alarm—awe-struck by the stillness.

The Baron van Rexelaer was praying for himself, in his weary middle age, for the few still near and dear to him, for the great name he bore so weakly. He was praying for the illustrious dead, his goodly heritage that none could take from him, for the old home, fast sinking away into the marsh of social ruin, for the villagers of Deynum, his children every one!

The little chapel was heavy with the petition.

From behind the plates on which their pompous dignities stand graven the dead lords of the soil came

slipping forth, in their armour and slashed doublets, in their long robes and ruffles, noiselessly crowding together, as they rapidly filled—with bended knee and head—the small space round the last scion of their line. Reinout Rexelaer sank forward to the ground, and his prayer came fast and thick:

“Oh, let it go up, my God! Blessed saints in heaven, pray for me that it go up at last!”

The “it” was the American money-market.

Presently, his orisons being concluded, the Baron quitted the chapel, and climbed to a rustic seat a little beyond, on the top of a mound which we, in our pancake-like flatness have dignified with the name of “The Mountain.” You get a good view of the Castle from here. But by the time the Baron reached the spot, nothing much was distinguishable beyond a confused mass of angles and gables, a greater darkness against the dark, and, standing out above it all, still clearly visible,—as it often is for miles around, whenever you get a break in the foliage,—the great ball of the summit as borne by Atlas, for full three hundred years, upon his never-wearying shoulders.

A rest upon “The Mountain” formed the invariable finale of the Baron’s afternoon walk. The rural postman purposely passed by it, on his way through the grounds, for of late the arrival of the evening mail had become the one important event of Mynheer van Rexelaer’s long day. He sat and waited. Alas, the nights were lengthening downwards, dark and chill. Soon it would be too late to decipher anything.

No need of daylight to make out the crumpled

paper lying upon his knees. He had re-read it frequently, and always angrily, within the last three days.

**"HIGH AND NOBLY-BORN HEER,**

**"I take the liberty, acting for the High-Born\* Heer Count Rexelaer, my client, to re-open a correspondence which your Nobleness closed a couple of years ago. Count Rexelaer's reason for wishing me to do so is that it has occurred to His High-Born Countship that circumstances may have supervened of late which might modify your views of his original offer, were he now to repeat it. His High-Born Countship therefore requests me to inform your Nobleness that he is still as willing as formerly to enter into negotiations for the purchase of the Castle and Manor of Deynum."**

The letter was signed by a Hague Notary, Klarens—old Klarens who did everything for the Court people in those days. It was dated October 3rd.

The old Baron knew all about Count Rexelaer of the Hague. He did not believe in Count Rexelaer.

"He has heard of Borck's offer to buy the Chalk-house Farm," reflected the Baron bitterly, for the fiftieth time. "He might have waited to hear that I shall refuse it."

And then his thoughts wandered to Lise, whose father lived at the Chalk-house Farm. He was annoyed with himself for having overlooked her salute.

"I am forfeiting my position too soon," he said

\* For some mysterious reason "High-Born," on the Continent, is a more exalted title than "High and Nobly-Born."



bitterly. "I must look to it. Trouble deprives a man of everything, excepting of himself."

And then the muffled tread of the postman absorbed his attention, as it came twisting up among the trees. The man stopped and slung round his bag.

"Nothing but the evening paper, Baron," he said, "and a letter for Mevrouw."

The evening-paper was all the Baron wanted. He fumbled tremulously in his pockets for a box of matches he knew to be there. He could not find them. The postman lingered, uncertain how to help.

"Go," said the old man impatiently. "Go on with your work. I mean, thank you, Jacob. Good-night."

Left in peace, he found his matches, and, bending over the wooden bench, under the whispering of the mighty trees, struck a light. He passed it rapidly down the column devoted to the day's Amsterdam Exchange.

"Down again, by God!" he said. And then the match went out, and all was dark.

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## CHAPTER IV.

## THE REXELAERS OF DEYNUM.

THERE have always been Rexelaers of Deynum. There are still. You can read about them in the *Annuaire de la Noblesse des Pays-Bas*. But probably you know.

If you do not, you may as well lay down this book: it does not address itself to you. It is written for a set. Ours.

The Rexelaers have intermarried with some of the great continental families, and are well-known in Germany and France. In fact, they themselves are—or were—a great continental family. For Willem van Rexelaer (grandson of the founder of the house), who remained with the Roman King Willem of Holland all through the long siege of Aix la Chapelle, was rewarded, on the day of his master's coronation, by the bestowal of the somewhat unwilling hand of the heiress of the Hohenthals, whose father and brother had fallen on the opposite side. It was this marriage which brought the fief of Hohenthal Sonnenborn into the family, making the head of the house a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, with the title of "Erlaucht." But that exalted rank fell away from them, some two and a half centuries later, when they got into trouble with the Habs-

burger Maximilian. There is a long correspondence in the Archives at Brussels showing how they plotted to get it back again, and perhaps they might have succeeded, had not Anne van Rexelaer joined the Compromise of the Nobles. Good Catholic as this powerful nobleman was, he would hardly have escaped the fate of Counts Egmont and Hoorn, had he not claimed, and obtained, the protection of his mother's cousin (and his own god-father), the Great Constable of France. You may look up all that in Motley, if you care to. It is hardly worth while.

Most truly they had been an illustrious family. At the time of this story they had dwindled down to a quiet old man, his wife and only daughter. And, shameful to relate, they were poor.

Ah, those were different times when Ruwert van Rexelaer sat enthroned in the Castle at Deynum, with thirty horses in his stables, and seventeen serving-men before his side-board, in green and gold. And when Rovert van Rexelaer, his brother—the renegade; God forgive him! the *Protestant*—having followed, like his ancestor of Hohenthal, another Dutch William to the conquest of another kingdom, rejected, in his pride, the alien honours that monarch would have conferred upon him. “I will make you a peer of England,” said William of Orange, “You shall be Baron Butterworth!” “Of William the Third’s creation,” replied Rovert, with low obeisance, and sank back in disgrace. He did not want a peerage. What he wanted, and had schemed for, like his ancestors, was the revival of the Roman Countship, not for himself but for the elder brother, whose doors he could never darken again. If ambition

had prompted his secession—as some still think it did—it could hardly have been hope of personal aggrandisement.

The Rexelaers had stuck to the old faith. And, as far as enforced retirement goes, they had suffered for their constancy. Thereby hangs the tale of the strange motto beneath their arms. When Anne von Rexelaer's son Eduard found himself deprived of his dignities by Prince Maurice, successor to "the Silent"—for so did they still go dropping between two stools—he withdrew in high dudgeon to his castle and carved over its portal the sentence: "*Ipsa glorior infamia.*" "I glory in my disgrace." They left him to his glory. And the words may be seen this day where Eduard van Rexelaer placed them.

The device, therefore, like most heraldic mottoes, is comparatively modern. It seems all the more so, if you accord credence to the story of the coat itself. You are asked to believe—not by me, mind you, though my son has the genuine Rexelaer blood in his veins, however spurious mine may be—you are asked to believe that the Christian maiden Wendela, having been confined by a heathen prince in his stronghold on the Rhine, was delivered by a lion, which penetrated into her chamber, a flaming sword in either fore-paw. An eighteenth century Rexelaer, in a wig and a Voltairean nose, wrote a pamphlet to prove that the story had been misunderstood. It belonged to the time of the Crusaders, he said, not to that of the Romans (A.D. 237), and the lion in question was no four-footed animal, but a lion-hearted knight of that surname and crest.

The other version is the prettier one. None of the Rexelaers have perhaps ever dared to believe it as much as they wanted to. Nor would many of them have cared to swear by their patron saint that their name was really derived from Rex Hilarius, this same King Hilarius having been baptised—after an unaccountable lapse of the family into heathenism—in 500 and something, by an old French priest who had named him in pious recollection of Bishop Hilary of Arles. It was all very beautiful and deliciously improbable, and one clung to it and might have died for it, but, as to believing it—well, the Crusading ancestor, the first Willem's grandfather, was an historic fact, and surely he ought to have sufficed for the requirements of the proudest, or the vainest, heart.

And what now was left of it all? The old Baron shook his head, as he passed over the bridge to the house. Not that he had been recapitulating, as he went, the long history of the Rexelaers. He had no need to do so. His heart was a burial-ground of the race, on which all the windows of his thoughts afforded an unconscious outlook.

"Mon cher," said the Baroness gently, "his Reverence has waited."

The Baron winced. He was a military veteran and had seen something of life—not much—in his day; he had never yet learned to accept a reproach from a woman, without a tendency to blush. And the Baroness was not one of those who accustom you to reproaches.

"I was delayed," replied the Baron humbly. "His Reverence will forgive a man of many occupations." He offered his arm to his wife with an odd little, old-fashioned bow, and the priest, who took life reposefully, grinned a good-humoured grin over the earnestness with which his patron created a round of meaningless duties out of the emptiness of everyday squiredom. "There are men who talk in their sleep for sheer waste of activity," the good father was wont to declare. "A better thing, in an ecclesiastic at any rate, than to sleep in his talk," the Baron had once unthinkingly made answer. And then he had filled up his guest's wine-glass, smiling an apology, as his eye-lids dropped obediently under the Baroness's dignified surprise.

"Come, Wanda," said Father Bulbius, crooking his arm at as wide an angle as he could manage from the rotundity of his rusty black coat.

But the daughter of the house, a girl of twelve with a mass of brown hair and big brown eyes, drew pettishly away from him. "No, thank you," she said. "You hurt my shoulder last time, squeezing through the doorway." And she ran on in front. "I don't like priests," she said to herself in the passage.

The meal was a simple one; but for its surroundings of old plate and older oak you would have called it poor. These people belonged to that daily decreasing class who cannot live poorly; their pomp is themselves. The Baron would have pitied *you*, not his wife, had you noticed the simplicity of the menu. And even fat Father Bulbius, dearly though he loved a good dinner, was happy in the eating of a bad one amidst the quiet

dignity of immemorial pride. Besides, was there not always the "King's Wine" nowadays, to gladden sinking hearts? You cannot miss hearing about the "King's Wine." The Baron was always referring to it.

To-day, however, the Baron referred to nothing, but left to his wife the unlaborious task of entertaining their familiar guest. The entertainment was single; for many years it had been based, by mutual consent, upon alternate monologue.

"At last then," emphasized the Baroness, slowly shaking her white side-curls, and the white ribbons on her white cap, "I carry out my threat of complaining to your Reverence, though I do so with the deepest regret."

She was not really an old woman, by-the-bye, not more than five and fifty, but her hair had been a silvery white for nearly twenty years, and she had set herself early to wear it gracefully. She wished to be old and to mortify the flesh. At least so she told herself and Father Bulbius.

"So far, Madame, I am altogether with you," answered the Father. He always said that to the Baroness Rexelaer. "And as I was telling the Baron, I cannot understand why my celery is not a success. I have followed out his instructions exactly." He threw himself back in his chair with a sigh, and his amplitude seemed to ooze out all around him. "I have constantly dug it up and put it into something else. In April I took one of my few meat-dishes for it, and Veronica made my life a burthen to me forthwith."

He stretched out his hand for his wine-glass and laughed heartily, and wiped his mouth.

"And the school-children, if they refuse to listen, must be made to feel," said the Baroness distinctly.

The Father had one advantage over her, inasmuch as he poured forth his words like a torrent, while she dropped hers one by one, as from a medicine-tube. On the other hand, he would invariably flounder astray in his own multiloquence, and then she saw her opportunity and took it.

"But, then, I *did* listen," he replied. "For in May, according to the Baron's instructions——" He looked towards the Baron. The Baron looked down at his plate. The old gentleman *could* not attend. "And seven eighths," he was saying to himself, "one dollar; two fifty; multiply by twelve. And seven eighths——"

"I emptied out my single cucumber-frame for it. And Veronica tells me she is dying for want of cucumbers. During *centuries*, it appears, they have formed a remedy in her family for some mysterious hereditary ailment. And I feel like a murderer, Mynheer, till your head-gardener comes and tells me that the celery is dying in the cucumber-frame, and must be buried in trenches at once."

The child looked across at him with solemn eyes, and spoke for the first time. "I buried my canary, too," she said gravely. "Last week. But it was dead first."

Nobody paid any attention to her. The shaded light from the old silver oil-lamp played—gently re-



flected from napery and crystal—upon the four faces round the table: the sallow, serious cheeks of the little girl, and her mother's calm white brow, the priest's fat double chin, with its pimple, the Baron's bent nose, bent head, bent everything.

That little red excrescence on the Father's chin was an old acquaintance of Wendela's. She used to wonder of what it was made and why. But now she knew. For, one day, in the drawing-room—she could have pointed out the exact spot—its horrid little specks and dents had suddenly resolved themselves before her fascinated gaze into a miniature face, like the Father's. She had never lost sight of the similitude. It laughed with the Father's laugh; it frowned with his frown, and all the time he was talking, it would wink with each movement of his chin, as much as to say: "Don't believe him." It was a little Baby Bulbius, as she had told her great friend and admirer, Piet Poster. "Priests don't have babies," said matter-of-fact Piet.

"And seven-eighths," reasoned the Baron silently with knitted brows, "seven times two and a half, seventeen hundred and fifty. Let me fill your glass, Bulbius."

"And they pop up out of their graves almost as fast as you bury them. If there's too much of them visible, they lose their colour: if there's too little, they choke. No, I am very much obliged to you, dear Baron. Besides, I believe your gardener hoped they would fail."

The child had been pondering intently. "It's a riddle," she said now. "What lives best for being buried? What lives best for being buried, Papa?"

The Baron roused himself at this direct appeal. "A great name," he said.

The child clapped her hands with elfish glee. "Wrong!" she cried. "Quite wrong. English sedlery."

"Celery," corrected the Baroness. "I wish you would listen to me, Father. Surely it is a terrible thought that the children should bring down damnation upon themselves——"

"Undoubtedly," acquiesced the Father. "But, then, fortunately, the good God has made it so difficult for them to do it."

"I cannot imagine your condoning their laughing in church,"—there was the faintest tinge of vexation in the lady's tone. The first article of their unspoken contract precluded interruption.

"Mevrouw, I condone nothing," replied Father Bulbius good-humouredly. "I exact penance for every sin confessed. The less confessed the better. The less that require confession, I mean, of course. The better for the guilty party, for everybody"—he yawned. "The King's wine is the King's wine still," he said to the Baron. He did not care for the Baroness to play curate.

"Le Roi est mort; vive le Roi!" replied the Baron solemnly. He threw up his hand for the military salute and touched his wine-glass with his lips. As he did so, an old servant, who stood by the side-board, saluted too.

"Le roi est mort; vive son vin," murmured the ec-

clesiastic, with goggle-eyes dancing over the rim of his bumper. His pronunciation was bad. The Baron frowned. The Baron thought his sentiment was worse.

"And what, I say, is to become of discipline, if they openly laugh at the priest?"

"Huh?" ejaculated the Father, whirling round to my lady. "Who laughs at the priest?" And he glared across at Wendela. He put on a most comical look of indignation, and the pimple immediately did the same. The child could not help laughing. The priest had one of those variable india-rubber countenances which remain comical even when they cry. They are made in a limited number of tints. His was purple. The olive-green are best.

"I have been striving for the last ten minutes," said the Baroness complacently, triumphant in her ultimate success, "to tell your Reverence that of late the village-children in the gallery have taken to laughing while you preach."

"But Me—Mevrouw!" spluttered his Reverence. He was really disconcerted. "I can hardly believe——"

"Yes, Gertrude, you are surely mistaken," interposed the Baron, who had at last finished his computation of the day's deficit.

"I am not mistaken, and it must be put a stop to," said the Baroness.

"It is his Reverence's own fault," said the child.

There was a general outcry. "Wendela, you forget yourself," said the mother sharply. "Wendela, little maiden, how do you mean?" asked the Baron.

"Shall I tell?" said the child, out loud. She was looking at the pimple; and the pimple winked at her.

"There's a hole in the velvet cap his Reverence wears at sermon-time," she continued slowly, "and his Reverence's hairs stick out in tufts. Sometimes they stick out in two tufts and sometimes in three. And the boys—bet." The stress she laid upon the venerable title would have been unconscionably naughty, had the Baroness not believed it impossible.

"Gracious Heavens!" ejaculated the shepherd of the school-children's souls.

"Marbles, and—and lollipops, and things," she went on hastily, now thoroughly frightened at her own audacity. "Last Sunday there was only one tuft, so none of the bets could count."

The Father rumbled his grey locks in manifest distress. They formed an untidy fringe round his bald red head, and he had long insulted and despised them. He now tried to pretend that they did not belong to him. With but partial success.

"But, my dear little one," said the Baron mildly, "you cannot know these things. You must be making them up."

"Papa!"—she flushed scarlet—"Papa!" In the ensuing silence, she felt that any avowal would be preferable to the imputation of untruthfulness. "Piet Poster told me," she murmured.

"For shame, Wendela," said her mother. "Let us hear no more about it. Try a fig, Father. They are

not as good as Veronica's, but even hers are not equal to the figs of my youth."

"Quite so," answered the Father, who was angry with his housekeeper, suspecting some spite in her neglect of his clothes. "I am grieved, Wanda, by your intimacy with these blasphemous—I say blasphemous—children. You might be led into imitating their wicked ways." He looked quite sadly at her. The pimple puckered up its little lips and appeared ready to weep.

"Figs," said the Baroness, "require exceptional care. They are so apt to run to seed."

"Tush, my dear Father, it is not as bad as that,"—the Baron stretched out his hand to his little daughter, moved by her distress—"you can hardly imagine my Wanda wagering her dolls against the village on the growth of your hair." And he laughed softly.

But this was dreadful. Without touching the outstretched fingers, Wendela started from her chair. "I—I am afraid," she explained in a great burst of tardy tears, "there was just one little bet, Papa, the Sunday before last, with—with Piet Poster."

"Leave the room immediately," cried her calm mother, with unwonted acerbity. "Consider yourself in disgrace! Piet Poster! I am deeply sorry to think it could be possible!"

"But I—I lost, Mamma," sobbed the culprit.

"That is hardly an alleviation, though certainly better than your winning. You have lost, however, a good deal more than your sweets."

"It was plums, Mamma," cried Wanda, as she fled in a tempest of angry dismay.

"I hate priests," she said to herself, in the darkness of her own room. Somehow she laid the blame of the whole miserable business on Father Bulbius's round, innocent head.

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## CHAPTER V.

## THE STRANGER COMES TO DEYNUM.

"A PRETTY amusement indeed," said the Baroness indignantly, as the door closed on the delinquent, "for the heiress of Deynum. Gambling with her peasant-boys."

"On the subject of their pastor's wig," added Bulbius despondently.

"Poor little heiress of Deynum," said the Baron.

"You are too indulgent, Reinout. I do not want to be harsh, but there are limits."

"Indulgent?" responded her husband. "Well, why not? I would have the heiress of Deynum enjoy what happiness she can. While she can." His voice sank over the words. And it seemed as if the dim light sank with the voice, and it grew still darker in the great, dark room.

The Father gazed down at his fingers, spread out upon the table-cloth.

"Mon ami, you are out of sorts to-night. Come, let us have coffee, and then you and his Reverence can play your game of écarté."

"Yes," said the Baron, with an effort; "I will ring the bell."

And then, suddenly, with an awkward jerk of the

arm, he snatched from his pocket the letter which had been burning a hole in it for the last three days. "There!" he said. He flung it on to the middle of the table, as if it were hot in his hand.

The priest made an involuntary movement to pass the paper on, then drew back again. The Baroness sighed, and coughed to hide the sigh.

"Fresh troubles?" she said softly. "Poor husband."

"On the contrary," the Baron smiled somewhat fiercely. "A happy deliverance. Count Hilarius van Rexelaer—so the gentleman calls himself—once more offers to purchase Deynum, as he offered a couple of years ago."

The Baroness looked contemptuous. "Is that all?" she said.

"I suppose he has heard, somehow, of Borck's proposal about the farm."

The lady's pale eyes flashed. "Rather to Borck than to that man," she said. "Even almost rather to Borck."

In spite of his trouble an amused look came into her husband's eyes. "Really?" he queried incredulously.

"Yes, yes, yes," she iterated, with vehement passion. And then she grew pale and calm again.

"But we shall sell it to neither," she added presently. "God is good."

"Beyond human hope or prayer, amen," said the priest fervently. And as he meditatively sipped his wine, his hot countenance grew solemn with an unspoken prayer for Deynum.



A knock came to the door. "There's a man sent up from the station, Mynheer," said the Baron's old servant. "Fokke Meinderts, your Worship remembers, old Mother Meinderts' son. The second one, that broke his leg last autumn——"

"What does he want?" interrupted the Baroness. She always interrupted Gustave. Her husband never did. "You lose half an hour a day by his meanderings," she had once remarked.

"So I do, my dear. But I gain a good deal more."

"How so?"

"A good man's affection."

"Nonsense."

"And perhaps"—this a little slyly—"ten years sooner of heaven?"

"Ah!" said the Baroness.

"I will go and find out what he wants," said the Master of Deynum. He stumbled wearily to his feet, and immediately his wife's spirit soared to one of her pinnacles of sacrifice.

"Let him come in here," she commanded. "*J'espère qu'il ne sentira pas trop mauvais.*" Gustave understood French, but his mistress considered that he had no business to. And, as for poor people, she approved of them in their own homes, where she diligently visited them.

The individual who was now ushered in appeared at the first moment to be a mass of revolving arms and legs. In reality he was an ordinary peasant, confused, bodily as well as mentally, by the Presence in which he unexpectedly found himself. And it seemed as if a

few right arms came jerking from his shoulders, as he began:

"An't please your Worship, and the Chief says" (*i.e.*, the station-master) "and I was to say as there's a dead gentleman at the station that wants to come to Deynum." He paused.

"Even the dead," said the Father with a solemn twinkle, "desire Deynum."

"Leastways, when I say 'dead,' your Reverence, I mean, as good as, or more probably so than not. He wasn't, when I left, but he would be, the Chief said, before I got here. You understand?"

"And what of this dead man, who is alive?" asked the Baron. "Was he coming here? We expect no one."

The yokel looked down at his great, dirty boots.

"Oh no, he wasn't coming here, Mynheer the Baron. He wasn't coming anywhere, because he is a foreigner. Leastways was, if he is dead. 'Tis a sin I should say it. But he can't remain in the waiting-room, and his servant wants to get him to the inn, he says. But there's only a waggonette at the inn, you know. And the Chief said he thought—if you were acquainted with the gentleman—it might be better like that, you understand."

Fokke Meinderts looked round upon the company in triumph and executed a rapid revolution, like a Catherine wheel. He felt altogether unexpectedly successful.

The Baron started up eagerly. His weary look had entirely left him. Already he saw this foreigner—this gentleman—left to die in the miserable open shed which

does duty in Holland for far larger stations than Deynum.

"Of course!" cried the Baron, "I am much obliged to the station-master. Gustave! Where is Gustave? Tell them to put to the horses! I will take the landau. At once!"

"But, my dear, you are tired!" ventured his wife.

"My own, there is nobody who can understand him. It is half an hour's drive. Amuse his Reverence, while I——" The door fell to behind him.

"Dear man," said the Baroness.

"Quite so, Madame," answered Father Bulbius absently. "So far I am altogether with you."

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## CHAPTER VI.

## THE WHITE BARONESS.

THE Baroness and her Priest adjourned to the drawing-room, there to await the development of what in their uneventful life was almost an adventure. The Baroness sat down to her nightly game of "Patience," and the Priest took his place beside her, as he invariably did, when not playing *écarté* with the Baron. For they played *écarté*. He knew that it ought to have been backgammon.

But the Baron, a mild man in his pleasures, had retained this weakness for games with a pecuniary risk. So he persuaded the good father to stake fivepence a game, and the results of a long evening's contest were practically nil. But the Baron would get irritable none the less over his luck, and many a time had the father confessor decided to speak the terrible words "No more cards." He never did so, for his kindly heart sent a telegram to arrest them on his lips. Still, he thought it hard lines, when a few days after his sermon (in a mended cap) on the iniquity of betting, Wanda innocently asked him, as if the idea had just occurred to her, whether *écarté* was a form of gambling or not.

Had he suspected for a moment that his patron's foible had led that unfortunate gentleman astray from

the courtly society of the Kings and Queens of the Card-table among the bulls and bears of the stock-exchange, he would have found it easier to settle the conflict in his own mind. The Baron preferred this large winning from Nobody. He did not like to mulct Bulbius, even of fivepence, though Bulbius, as his patron was well aware, was possessed of (modest) private means of his own.

Neither did the Baroness know anything of her husband's futile hunting-excursions in the howling wilderness afore-mentioned. Had she known, she would not have understood, and that, in itself, was sufficient excuse for his not telling her. The Baroness was one of those women who cannot be made to grasp the difference between consols and coupons. All their ideas of "bonds" and of "shares" are connected with a husband and a home. They are none the stupider for that. You could not look Gertrude van Rexelaer in the face and write her down a fool.

Nearly forty years ago—through one crowded, self-concentrated season—she had been a Court beauty. Her father, one of the few great Catholic nobles, had brought her up to the Hague from his Castle in Limburg, a part of Holland which no Hollander has ever heard of. And immediately the lovely provincial had become, at all receptions and entertainments, not "a nice," but "that nice" little girl. She stood forth an object of attraction to the other sex, of detraction to her own. In one word, her social success was complete. And one evening, at the Palace, a chivalrous Monarch, stooping to hand her a fan she had dropped in her youthful trepidation, requested the favour of a

dance for a beardless and awkward young officer, who had caught his Majesty's kindly eye, as he hung dangling, forlorn, against the wall.

So did Gertrude de Heerle receive her fate from the hand of her King. The young officer turned out to be a distant connection, Reinout van Rexelaer. And a few months later the Beauty exasperated everybody, especially her father, by deliberately spurning from her the well-filled hand of a notoriously profligate suitor and accepting the better-filled heart of her handsome "cousin" Reinout. The Rexelaers always married into the family if possible, so as to get as much of their own blood as the Rubric would permit.

The pair were very poor at first, to everybody's satisfaction; and they were visibly happy, to everybody's disgust. The "everybody" were a couple of hundred men and women in society, and as few of these were happy, and none of them were poor, they had a right to protest. Presently brighter seasons came to the young Rexelaers, across a period of honest tears and mourning, when first Reinout's elder brother having died, and then his father, the young people shook the tinsel-dust of the "Residency" from their feet, and the poor regimental pay out of their pockets, and went to live at Deynum. They carried away with them a healthful scorn of the gas-lit glitter of that bursting bubble which you and I, dear Vicomte, call "our world."

A period of calm prosperity followed, over-shadowed by a gradually descending cloud. They had no children.

The Baroness had always been a fervent Catholic.

The unfulfilled yearning for an heir deepened her piety into devotion and, as the empty years sped on, into bigotry. She sank into the hands of the priests, as an invalid is gradually fascinated by doctors, resolved to climb up into heaven and wrench down the blessing withheld. She fasted and mortified herself, and even undertook such short pilgrimages as were within her reach. She would have gone jumping to Echternach, but here, for the first time, her husband interfered. So she stayed at home and sent for miraculous waters to drink and to bathe in. And she thanked heaven, whether it heard her or not, and prayed yet once more for a hearing.

Her hair had turned white some ten years after her marriage. "From moping," her husband told her, with tender reproof, but that was not so, these white heads being peculiar to the de Heerles, as you can see from the famous "Jan de Heerle" in the National Museum at Amsterdam. Baron Reinout never alluded to their common trial, excepting to rally his wife on her grief for it. Besides the anxiety to spare her, there was hope against hope in his heart. A Rexelaerless world? He had faith in the indispensableness of the Rexelaers.

With the whitening of her hair the last bit of colour seemed to die away from the Baroness. Her beautiful complexion had always had the pallor of marble; her eyes had been the weak point; they were faint; they grew fainter still. When the pleasures of this world fell away from her, she had taken to dressing very much in white. Her husband liked it; to her it was a compromise between the rainbow-hues of

vanity and the black of religious seclusion. The villagers looked at each other with something akin to awe as the slender figure went flitting between the trees, a vision of pureness, with the basket of charity on one arm. People began to speak of "The White Baroness" in all the country round. Perhaps she liked it. Perhaps what had been at first a natural predilection developed into a *parti pris*. For years she was "the White Baroness," a pure and pallid apparition, very silent, very kind to the poor and suffering, very strong- and narrow-willed. She surrounded herself with white doves and white chickens, white cats, and white roses. The latter hobby, in especial, took possession of her; she could never get blossoms enough for the little Chapel in the Park. "An infant's soul as white as these," she murmured in her prayers, over and over again, in the silence of the sanctuary, and all the dead Rexelaers lay still and listened. "O spotless Virgin, a little, little infant, with a soul as white as these!"

The head-gardener at Deynum—they had a better one in those days—even succeeded in producing a new white variety which he named in her honour. She was very proud of it. Is it not written down in all the rose-growers' catalogues as "The White Baroness" to this day?

As her piety increased, she would have had all men share it, her particular form of piety, of course. And that is a difficult matter in a world whose good and evil are variously shadowed by each good man's individual eclectic light. Besides, Deynum was officially split up into two colours, Roman Catholic and Protestant. "Catholic and Beggar," the Baroness would have said.



For the Romanists of Holland still daily insult their old antagonists with that most honourable by-word of "Gueux."

The Baroness pitied all beggars and would have fed them. But when they refused the communion of any other table than their own, her pity, turning under the thunder of papal anathemas, soured rapidly to wrath. And she made war upon them to drive them forth, as the Rexelaers, having themselves felt the weight of persecution, had never done before. She boycotted them, a very common thing in Holland, although rather an unfair one, because the Protestants, whether more tolerant or more indifferent, do not retaliate in this manner. And as the years went on she perfected her system of repression, cruel only to be kind. "In the choice between a son of the Church and an infidel, why choose an infidel?" she asked. The Baron could not deny that she was theoretically right. But he strove practically to minimise results. "Let us be faithful in little things, dearest," said the Baroness, "we who ask so great a thing of God."

And the hot breath of persecution opened up the blossoms in cold Calvinistic hearts, as is its mission, and there was a revival. There had never been a Protestant church at Deynum, the worshippers going to the neighbouring parish of Rollingen; but now it became suddenly manifest that this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue. The difficulty was how to get it altered, for all the available land in the village belonged to the Baron. A movement was set on foot, but it proved unavailing, for, even had his wife not

been there to instruct him, Reinout Rexelaer would hardly have consented to so startling an intrusion. "Let them worship as they have worshipped for ages," he declared. "If worship it be," added Gertrude. The dispute spread into the newspapers. And the powerful lord of the adjoining parish, Baron Borck, took it up. He was a man of easy indifference in matters of religion—the more modern name is "tolerance"—but some stories of Mevrouw Rexelaer's rigour had reached him, and his wife and daughters had petty grievances against their neighbours, and there had been a dispute about a ditch. Baron Borck was a Member of the States Deputed, which are a small governing body elected out of the States Provincial. He was a man of authority and he used it in an endeavour to procure a Decree of Expropriation on the ground of general utility. But the Baroness fought him with dogged pertinacity. "Shall we bring down a curse upon us?" she repeated incessantly. "We who have such especial need of a blessing?" She dragged up the chancel-steps on her naked knees. She sent forth angry glances from her castle turret towards the impudent Protestant steeple of Rollingen. And she sent forth also from that same elevation, into the stormy night, her favourite snow-white carrier-pigeon, that he might lift up the story of her sufferings for the faith to the very bosom of the Queen of Heaven. But the pigeon was a nineteenth-century bird, and went back to his dovecot.

She conquered, whether by these means or others. She carried her cause up to the Privy Council, and there she conquered. Not a single member of that

august assembly could see any connection between a Church and a matter of general utility.

And then the gift, so strangely, so fearfully sweet to a hope deferred, came upon her as a reward. She accepted it, humbly before God, triumphantly before men. In those days of calm expectancy, with the smile of Heaven upon her, she felt as Hebrew Hannah must have felt when the Lord took away his hand-maid's reproach. She was more than forty years old. She had been married more than twenty. The child was born; and it was a girl.

When they told her, she said: "God's will be done." She said it aloud. And when they offered to bring her the babe, she answered: "Presently." Which shows what her heart said.

A little later its wailing cry broke in upon her faintness. She turned her head from the wall. "Is that the little one?" she asked. And they laid it upon her breast.

She went through the ceremony of her churcing, and she regularly attended mass. But during six months she did not go to pray in the loneliness of the chapel, and, throughout all that period, its altar remained destitute of flowers. One morning she walked into the library and went straight up to the curtain which usually hung down over the book-shelves of the eighteenth-century Rexelaer who had explained away the lion-myth. She pushed it aside with resolute hand, and took down a volume—of Voltaire! She stood turning over the pages undecidedly for a few moments, then she shut it up with a shudder, and went away again. Her eyes were dry and hard.

She loved her baby-girl; it was not against the child that her anger was kindled. The miraculous answer which need not have been, yet now was, and was not an answer, struck her in the face like a personal taunt. And she was as one in an open boat that drifts away from the friend he loves, beyond all loving, because that friend has cut the rope which held him moored.

"Reinout," she said one day, before her convalescence, while her life yet hung in danger,—*"Give Baron Borck the bit of land he wants, near the mill."*

"Hush," said her husband. *"You mustn't talk."* He thought her mind was wandering.

*"Somehow, I don't want you to sell it. Simply give it. Throw it in his face."*

"Yes, yes. Hush," said the Baron.

She lifted her eyes and looked at him. "You think I'm not, not conscious," she murmured in surprise. "Reinout, I know I'm in danger. I may be dead to-morrow. Write to-night. A scornful letter. Tell him it doesn't—matter—how—they—pray."

And he wrote, after some hesitation. It was her answer. A defiance to High Heaven, with Death at her chamber-door.

Father Bulbius, who had bravely seconded her during the battle, opened his eyes wide with disappointment. And then he half closed them, as was his habit, and watched.

"My daughter," he said one day, after he had listened—in the confessional—to her recital of various peccadilloes, "you have difficulties of which you do not speak. The sun of your contentment does not shine as it did before."

"I am as you have always known me, Father," she answered. And he saw that that door was closed.

He waited another couple of months, and slept nine hours at night, and an hour after his noonday dinner. And of evenings, when not engaged with the Baron, he watched the Baroness's game of Patience, and he played his own little game of Patience too.

He won it on the day when the distressed Baron confided to him, as the greatest of secrets, that the Baroness had tried to read Voltaire. That evening the Father discoursed eloquently on the infidel writer, of whom he had never read a word, repeatedly regretting the speciousness of his arguments, which only your *deep* thinker, he said, could resist. In the lady's ignorance the name 'only' stood out, a recollection of earliest eschewment, synonymous with Luther or the Devil. But her curiosity was aroused, and when she slipped into the library next morning, the volume containing "La Pucelle" came most easily to her hand. She turned from that in horror, successfully biased by a very few pages, and took down a controversial work. These, then, were the thoughts of an infidel. And as she read, carelessly at first, his attacks upon a faith which lay dead within her, that faith awoke in its grave and cried out. These things were false. Yonder accusation was absurd. Against this statement it could be argued—— She rose from her reading with a flame in her pale eyes. She must reason about these matters with someone. Why, even a woman like herself could see the sophistry of the argument on page 105. She was rather proud of seeing it so clearly. She must tell Father Bulbius about it.

And she did. He showed her, intellectually, the evil ways of infidelity. Her woman's heart rose up against the foolish pride of feeble sense. And under ideal persecution she revived, as surely as the materially oppressed Protestants of Deynum.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts," said the poor lady. "When one learns to understand what a godless man's thoughts are like, it is not difficult to admit that God's thoughts must be better, even when not, or when mis-,understood." The old fervour did not return to her, but there were once more "White Baroness" roses on the chapel-altar. Her almsgiving had never changed.

"Who knows what may still happen?" said the Baron, sturdily. "All things are possible with the Almighty," he said. And once, when she had turned upon him, in one of their most rare dissensions, and had burst out with "Not the ridiculous!" he waited until one evening, in the chapel, they paused before a window gorgeous with a crimson sacrifice of Isaac. "That also was a race," he said softly, "which Heaven, in its Providence, could not allow to die out."

But the Baroness van Rexelaer had nothing in common with Sarah. Not even a liking for the children of Abraham.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## HEUREUX EN MARIAGE.

"SHOULD you not have moved your ten on to the knave?" inquired the Father mildly. "That would have enabled you to get at your ace."

"Yes, but I wanted to free my seventh line," said the Baroness.

The Baroness's game is a very complicated one. It has the true merit of a game of Patience: like its homonym, it hardly ever succeeds.

"How well your little Carlsbad cards wear, Mevrouw," said the Father, searching, in his restless loquacity, for a subject of conversation. "You have never, I believe, been to Carlsbad?"

"No, I have never been anywhere," replied the Baroness.

"Nor have I. But I knew a young clerical colleague, who went there two years ago, for a melancholy he could far better have cured by a religious retreat at the College."

"Perhaps it was dyspepsia," suggested the Baroness. You see, she had read Voltaire.

"If so, he could have cured it by fasting. Besides, it was not the slightest use his going to Carlsbad, for he died before he got there."

"Indeed!" said the Baroness, with that sudden interest which the final catastrophe always awakens. Then she added mechanically: "How sad!"

"He died in a railway accident," continued the Father. "And the most provoking thing of all was that, when the doctors opened the body, they were unanimous in declaring that Carlsbad could never have cured him, after all."

"But that did not matter to him then," objected the Baroness.

"Perhaps not," replied Father Bulbius, doubtfully. "But, somehow, it has always seemed to me so like a case of suicide, without the ghost of a reason."

The Baroness looked at the clock. A couple of logs of wood lay smouldering and flickering on the open hearth. The soft glow of the fire and the softer lamplight played over the delicate lines of the lady's face and over her slender, blue-veined hands, as she sorted her game. There was a gentleness about the warm quiet little drawing-room with its subdued, old-fashioned colours and a glamour of something almost like romance over the stately figure in grey satin with white lace collar and wrist-bands, white hair and white cap. In spite of the grey apparel which time had led her to adopt, the Baroness was the White Baroness still.

There was nothing romantic, however, about Father Bulbius, who sat doubled up by the little green card-table, his broad forehead closely knotted over the puzzle of his colleague's *felo de se*.

"He will be coming back again soon," remarked the Baroness, thinking of her departed lord.



"Hardly that," replied the Father. "He was definitely dead."

"Not definitely, I fancy. I merely understood that the station-master expected him to die."

"Oh, but excuse me, my dear lady, I remember nothing of the station-master's opinion. Though there certainly was a station-master concerned, whom everybody considered to blame. As for me, I should prefer to censure the foolish ones who go hurrying through Europe to escape from themselves. I have one insuperable objection to medicines; they all make me unwell. Trust in God and put a cold water compress where the pain is. That's my cure." The good priest liked the Baroness to leave him master of the field; the Baroness did not listen.

The Baron found them thus amiably consorted when he returned. His face was very grave.

"Dear me, if the man was dying, perhaps I ought to have gone to him!" cried the priest with tardy compunction.

"He is dying," replied the Baron; "but he need not do so without your aid. It is a foreigner, taken with acute spasms in the train, who finds himself stranded here. Undoubtedly he is very ill."

"Where is he now?" queried the Baroness. "Is he better? Is he a gentleman? Or shall I send him some soup?"

"He is a gentleman. He is very old. The servant told me his name was M. Farjolle; he says he is a Frenchman. They are at the inn."

"At that place?" cried Mevrouw. "Mon cher, you should have asked him here."

"Mon amie, he steadfastly refused to come."

"Ah, pardon. Of course you would do what was right."

"I do not think he understood," said the Baron. "He offered a napoleon for the use of the carriage."

"For shame," exclaimed the Baroness, who considered that no suffering could excuse such an error.

"I told him that he was mistaken, but that I should be glad to accept a florin for the coachman," said the Baron coolly. "And then I left him in peace."

"Which means," cried his wife quickly, "that you came back on the box. Oh, Reinout, how could you? At least say that the weather was fine."

"It might be worse," replied the Baron, and he walked away to fetch the newspaper, sitting down quietly, now, to its Home and Foreign News.

"Aha," he said suddenly, in the tone of a man who makes a discovery. "This explains Monsieur Rexelaer's move. 'Appointed to the post of Sub-Comptroller of the Royal Household, Count Hilarius Jan Reinout van Rexelaer.' At last."

"And what is that, Mynheer the Baron?" asked Bulbius, slowly hoisting himself off his chair.

"Oh, it's the man that looks after the larder and buttery," interposed the Baroness sharply.

"Well, he has edged himself into the enchanted circle," said the Baron, "and now he wants to cut a figure as a noble and a great landed proprietor."

"And a Rexelaer," added the Baroness.

In the thoughtful silence that followed, the Priest took his leave. "Have you got an umbrella?" asked the Baron, following him out of the room.

"No. Why so? It isn't raining."

"Hush. Yes, it is. But it might be raining a good deal harder at this time of year; might it not?"

Mynheer van Rexelaer went back to his wife. She had risen and was standing by the mantelpiece.

"Sub-Comptroller of the Royal Household," she said slowly, and with increasing bitterness—too scornful not to reveal a little touch of envy.—"In all things for the last twenty years, has Fortune favoured this adventurer, baulking, according to her custom, the better man."

He took one of her hands in his. "Not in all things," he said.

"How so?"

He pointed to the cards now lying in a little stream across the table. "Heureux en mariage," he said, "malheureux au jeu. Let the Count take his share. I have mine. No man, it appears, may claim both."

As he spoke, his look fell on the crumpled newspaper lying against his deserted chair. And his own words struck home to him. "Malheureux au jeu."

She pressed his hand, and they stood silent, side by side. Then he broke away, with an exclamation of impatience, to wind up the oil-lamp.

She came after him. "But he has not got Deynum yet," she said, "this Count." Oh the contempt of the last word, from her lips!

"No, he has not got Deynum yet."

"But, Reinout."

"What is it, Gertrude?"

"He has a son."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## A PRINCE OF THE BLOOD ROYAL.

"SHE has looked them out in the 'Annuaire de la Noblesse,'" thought the Baron. "Yet what could she care about these people? How inquisitive the best of women are."

The Baroness had done more, while angry with herself for doing it. Writing to an acquaintance at the Hague, she had casually inquired after those other Rexelaers: "Do you know anything of our namesakes, the Count's family, I mean? There is a boy—is there not?—called Reinout." The unknown Reinout Rexelaer incessantly tormented her unwilling thoughts. Yet she turned to the answer with a sort of irritable pleasure.

"You ask after the Rexelaers," wrote the Hague lady. "Him one meets everywhere. Her I have never seen. I know his brother's family better; the wife there, you know, is one of our own set, a Borck, and I like her very much. Since the Count brought back his nigger spouse and her millions from Brazil, where he was secretary or something, he has worked day and night to recover the position they had lost through their impecuniosity, but the black woman is an obstacle. She locks herself up in a hot-house, people say, and cries for the sun. It is a great pity they should be

Protestants—How was that, by-the-bye?—still, now that you, my dear Gertrude, have only a daughter, it must be a source of real satisfaction to you to remember that this other branch is blessed with sons. The Rexelaer-Borcks have two, and there is one boy, one child, at the Count's. Yes, his name is Reinout, like your husband's. I suppose it is a family name?

"The little that I know of the lad is rather interesting, I think. For some foolish reason they keep him altogether apart; perhaps that is a Brazilian idea. He is educated, it appears, into a premature little man of the world, and put to bed in a court wig and ruffles. I don't know particulars. But he comes to a gymnastic class with my children, attended by the queerest, courtliest little Louis Quinze chevalier that you ever saw off a snuff-box lid. I met him there once, and he stood aside to let me pass, lifting his cap with the air of a young prince, enough to break the heart of a mother of hobbledehoys. He is a very handsome youth, dark complexioned, with big, expressive eyes. Of course the other boys do not care for him. He had a violent quarrel with my own Louis, in which I cannot help thinking Louis was wrong. I have run on, but I fancy that is about all. How is Wendela?"

The Baroness slowly tore the letter up and placed the fragments on the blazing fire.

It was unavoidable that the boys with whom he was brought into such unsatisfactory contact should look askance at young Reinout. "Unbeknown is unbeloved," says a Dutch proverb. Schoolboyhood

whispered derision of the little gentleman with the kid gloves.

And when schoolboyhood whispers derision, its next step is to shout it. His companions, as his father fondly called them, began to tease him at the various classes where they met. They would bow before him and address him as "Your Majesty," in never tiring allusion to the ancestral King Hilarius, with whom Reinout himself had unwarily made them acquainted. All of them had plenty of ancestors of their own, but the King was a delightfully fresh source of amusement. And thence sprang the quarrel with the Louis mentioned above.

This Louis, one afternoon, had made a highly successful joke about Reinout and his dog, whom he nicknamed "the two Princes." Carried away by his own wit, he aimed, just as the class was dispersing, a couple of blows with a fencing foil at the lad and the brute, missing the former, but drawing a yelp of protest from the veritable 'Prince.' Quick as thought Reinout turned and, first checking himself with a chivalrous "On your guard!" flashed a retort full into his aggressor's left eye. He was carried off in a fume of indignation, by his faithful Mentor, who knew not whether to scold or approve, and, on reaching home, he ran straight to his father's study.

"Papa!" he began impetuously.

"Hush!" said the Count, who was looking over his cash-book. The Count was an admirable, and scrupulous, financier.

"Well?" he asked, presently, jotting down some figures.

"Papa, it is all true—is it not?—about Rex Hilarius, and the lion and Wendela, isn't it?"

"Of course it is true, René," replied the Count with a smile.

The boy gave a great gasp of relief. "I am so glad to hear you say that," he almost sobbed. "Then I may *kill* whoever says it is not?"

His father burst out laughing. "Certainly not," cried the Count. "You may kill nobody. On the contrary, you must be on very good terms with all your companions. There's not one of them but you may want him some day."

Reinout stood lost in reflection. "Life is very difficult," he said at last. "Do you know, Papa, I think it is almost impossible for a man always to know how to act as a gentleman."

"Certainly not," cried the Count again. "Nothing is easier. It becomes a habit, like all others. Like speaking French without mistakes."

"But I don't mean politeness," said Reinout vaguely. "I mean about doing right."

"Of course," replied the Count, turning to his books again. "So do I, Reinout. Ask Monsieur de Souza. He knows."

But Reinout did not immediately return to his tutor. He went to look for his mother in the conservatory, where she lay, on her lounge, enveloped in heat, a novel of Catulle Mendès in her hand.

"Shut the door, René," she said without lifting her eyes. Her attitude was ultra-languid, but her soul was

palpitating with the heroine's infidelities. The Countess had literary tastes and aspirations, as will be amply proved in the future. She even composed poetry. Private poetry, of course, as befitted her rank.

Reinout stood gazing at his mother in silence, for one whole minute. He was searching, confusedly, for explanation and expression. But his heart seemed too full for speech.

With her eyes unalterably intent on her book, the beautiful Creole—she was still beautiful—slowly drew to light from the folds of her dressing-gown a pink-ribboned confectioner's bag, which she held out in the direction of her son. "Take some sweets," she said.

The boy required no second bidding, but plunged his fingers eagerly down. "Are there any of those chocolates with the green stuff inside?" he asked.

She nodded, a little impatiently, and he went away, with his hands full, to demonstrate to Monsieur de Souza's not unconvincible ears that he must fight Louis to-morrow, and lick him.

Never, surely, had child a stranger tutor. Monsieur de Souza-Calhao was an old Portuguese gentleman of shattered health and fortunes, but of irreproachable ancestry and experience. The Rexelaers had come across him, just before they quitted Rio, and had brought him away with them. He talked incessantly, pumping up his words with an audible draw,—he was a great sufferer from asthma,—and his talk, a life's harvest of gentle cynicism, delighted the Count. "Teach my boy," said the latter, "whatever you remember yourself. All the rest, I feel sure, is unnecessary. Con-



tact with the world and those who know the world is the only education. At school children but learn what life teaches them to forget. Make a man of him, like ourselves, that has seen men and cities. And furnish him with enough arithmetic to reckon for number one." The two men shook hands. Count Rexelaer so thoroughly believed in what he said, that, from the child's earliest youth, he had taken him about with him everywhere. Well, nearly everywhere. When he left M. de Souza, he went in to his wife, and explained his plan. The Countess demurred. She had aspirations, poor thing, in her own foolish way, and she suggested the addition of "The poets." Count Hilarius smiled. "Ma chère," he said, "believe me; I know my own class. The Almanach de Gotha and the Paris Figaro are a liberal education."

Monsieur de Souza carried out his instructions and improved on them. He was a shrewd and kindly man, not soured by his misfortunes, which he bore with easy philosophy. He liked his pale little pupil—"the child is not strong, don't let him learn too much," had been the verdict of a great Paris physician. "Ah, you see," said the father. It was an education which many a more correctly educated man might have envied. The tutor, for instance, would take Bucharest for the morning's subject, and would then talk for a couple of hours, first about the city as he remembered it—he had been everywhere—and the places of interest near, the dress and habits and peculiarities of the Roumanian people. "All this," he would say, "you can go and see for yourself someday," but then he would proceed farther and tell about the great Roumanian families,

their members, their possessions, their relations to the brand-new German-silver crown. He would repeat these stories from time to time and ask his pupil about them, and so, gradually travelling round the world, the boy learned all about the net-work of vulgarity and vanity which keeps it together, the little tangle of kings, ministers and mistresses in which it swings. But he also learned a variety of other things, a smattering of conversation about latter-day pictures and operas, for instance, nothing beyond the limits of elegant ignorance. And he was early taught dancing, riding, fencing, his mother's accomplishments. The Countess Margherita came in to fence with her son and mortified him into efficiency by her successes. "Never kill your man, unless you want to," she cried, as she leaped straight at the boy's heart. To see her lithe figure bounding to and fro in a quiver of excitement,—she fenced in the French manner—one would have imagined it impossible that this was the woman who for days could only loll on couches in conservatories and munch lollipops.

"And especially, Monsieur de Souza," said the poor Countess, "I beg of you to supplement your own vast experience by the reading of books with my son. Let him know how the great intellects saw life." "You mean novels, Madame?" suggested the old gentleman. "Novels, Poems, *Le vrai, Le bon, Le beau*. Whatever edifies a character." So Reinout read his tutor's two favourites, *La Bruyère* and *Montaigne*. The tutor did not take kindly to the Countess's suggestion. As for works of the imagination, he held them in abhorrence. "If you *must* read," he frequently said to Reinout, "although I see no reason for your doing so, then

memoirs are best." Reinout waded through a certain number of Court memoirs of the 17th and 18th centuries, and very queer information he got out of them.

But M. de Souza did not only acquaint him with the evil side of the old régime. This cavalier of the old school had its virtues as well as its vices. He had its code of honour, not a perfect one, perhaps, but far better than anything the boy could have ever learnt from his father. "Never do anything mean to a woman,"—he might have added: "except under the cloak of 'love,'" for that was what he meant. "Never be afraid of any man." "Never do anything you need be ashamed of"—that sounds well, but many an unworldly soul might be surprised to hear of what things the chevalier was not ashamed. Self-stricken of misfortune, he taught his generous-hearted pupil to respect, and, if possible, to relieve it. "A gentleman should not save, but spend," the old spendthrift was never tired of repeating, "wisely, if possible, and, if not possible, ill. Money must flow, or it freezes." And he would tell again the story of the Duc de Richelieu and his grandchild.

The result of this peculiar training was a little aristocrat, heart and soul, face and bearing, manners and speech, a boy of fourteen, with much of the profoundly ignorant "knowledge of the world" of a roué, and no less of that unasked, good-natured pity for the vague millions outside its circle, which is built up on unmerited contempt. He was profoundly ignorant of the real lights of life, standing, as he did, from child-

hood upwards, under the glare of its wax candles, but he was eager, intuitively, to love, to help, to be of use by word or deed. And he remembered the words of the old Belgian gentleman: *A gentilhomme devoir fait loi*. And in the far distance he caught the vague music of their meaning, like the roar of a slowly approaching tide.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## DISEASE.

"ANTOINE!"

"At your orders, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Hist. You take a delight in disobeying me."

"But I had understood that, when we were alone——"

"You had understood nothing. You never understand."

"If Monsieur wishes to have his title ignored, what of these?" As he spoke, the man carelessly fingered one of the many gold-stoppered bottles which he was arranging on the shaky little side-table. Cool impudence and indifference were written in every line of his shaven face.

"True," said his master pensively. "Lock the things away, and have new ones from Amsterdam. How much can they cost? A thousand francs, at the utmost. Find out an address, and write to-day."

"As it will please Monsieur. But when Monsieur remembers that all his underclothing is dotted over with the sign of his exalted rank, I would ask myself——"

"Well, get other things."

"I would ask myself if Monsieur considers it worth while."

If the man had looked for a storm of abuse, he did not get it. "Push forward that table," said the Marquis. "Place the morphia-injector where I can reach it. And give me '*Les Mémoires de Cocodette*.' So. Now go down into the village and find out all about it."

"But it is pouring with rain, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Can I not see? Go down into the village and find out all about it."

The valet slunk towards the door. His master called after him. "I desire to know, especially, the name of the seigneur of the village. In whose carriage was I brought here last night?"

"That I can tell already to—to Monsieur. The name is Rexelaer."

"Ah! Well, find out the rest." The Marquis remained alone.

It was a poor apartment enough, even for a village inn. Strangers did not stop at Deynum. The place was one to feed your horses at before you hurried on. And the chubby-faced peasant hostess had been far more put out than pleased by the arrival, in her Lord's own carriage, of the distinguished invalid and his still more terrible serving-man. She had hurriedly prepared her own sitting-room—a secret never to be divulged—while the Marquis lay gasping, amid fumes of cheap gin and cheaper tobacco—in the hurriedly deserted parlour below.

The whole bedroom was full of indefinable odours, not especially evil, but suggestive, generally, of old clothes, and hard labour, and mustiness. There were

little windows everywhere, unfit for airing, that yet let in marvels of draught. The bright red beams of the ceiling lay heavy on your head. A great bedstead with faded green curtains (of quite a different shade from the green strip of carpet) stood against one side of the wall, opposite two bad prints from fine pictures of the Holy Family. So far there was nothing at which you could take offence. But in the middle of it all was suspended a truly painful object, the joy of its possessor's heart, a brand-new paraffin lamp of the commonest make of cuivre poli, highly wrought in flowers and faces, and surmounted by a pale-green globe with a pink paper border. It hung there crooked and greasy, odorous and two-and-sixpenny, unusable though filled to overflowing, an insult to the honest deal tables and rush-bottomed chairs upon which it looked down.

But the Marquis noticed none of these specifically; he only realized an unendurable discomfort. He lay back in a common but comfortable wicker chair, his tall and elegant figure wrapped in a white plush dressing-gown faced with silk. And he was as carefully oiled and brushed as ever.

He was thinking of himself. He had rarely thought of anything else for more than seventy years. But never had he had sadder subject for his cogitations than now. During a few moments, certainly, his mind lingered over the name which Antoine had flung to him in departing. There rose up before him a memory of a dusty road in the glare of a July sun, and a little fellow seated in the middle of it, across his hoop, white and hot, shame-faced but triumphant. Of course it must be so. He had understood the connection at

once. That he should come to this place, of all others, to die!

"That dog, Antoine, smelt death," he said aloud, "or perhaps I should not have told him. Yet, I don't know. Great God, I am all alone in the world."

His life had been a long one, crowded with incidents which had interested him absorbingly at the time of their occurrence. In the seventy-three years of its duration not so much had happened as in the last twenty-four hours. And this much he now understood of time and eternity, that the longest period of the longest life is the moment in which it ends.

He was a great noble. He had lived the little round of his class: horses, women, shooting, cards, women, horses, shooting, women, cards. He had been in the diplomatic service for a certain period: that only meant larger experience in the women of various nationalities; and he had graced during many years the presidential chair of the Society for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses; that meant a certain amount of betting, but he was rich and could afford it. In fact, he had done his duty to his King, his Country and himself. He had done more than his duty, for he need not have patiently suffered banishment to Madrid, where the cuisine did not agree with him, nor need he have kept so many race-horses in the interests of agriculture. Even had he confined himself to the round above-mentioned, he could still have proved himself—what he was—a great noble.

There was the incident of the Marquise. How small it looked now! For there had been a Marquise



who had spread her existence through no less than twenty-seven years of his life. He had hated her, because she had borne him no children, to be great nobles like himself. He had never paused to question his hatred, he, the roué, who had married a young girl. He did not think she had much to complain of: he seldom objected to her doing what she chose. She had only been an incident. He forgot her.

And his life, as has been said, had been very full, crowded with the labour of each day's many pleasures. He looked down it now, and he could distinguish nothing. He could not even remember any point of especial interest. Ah yes, there was that—when he was quite a young lad—that innocent little girl who—whom——. He took up the book of dirty stories from his lap and began to read.

And this is what he read. A dull weight always there. At first the thought that it must be fancy. The question: Do I really feel it? Then, with increasing iteration: Do I not feel it? There it is again. I never felt anything like it before. I wonder what causes it. Something indigestible I must have eaten. But I never knew things to be indigestible before. I never was ill before. I am not ill now.

Of course not. But why this deadly feeling of sickness which keeps creeping up without any apparent reason? Why that sudden fainting at the club, which proves my fancy not fancy but fact?

He laid down the book at the unturned page, and sat staring through the narrow, muslin-curtained window

at the steady rain outside. The elms on the village-green swayed cheerlessly under the lowering sky.

When was it that the stern reality had first seized him by the throat? Ages ago. Life is long, after all, when we look back upon it. Immensely long. The summer before last? Last summer.

How annoying it had all seemed at the time. But his doctor had promised to cure him in a month or two. He had always kept a doctor, like a chaplain, without requiring either.

Then had come that first attack of pain. How that had suddenly altered the whole face of the matter! How furious he had been with the numskull who had allowed his indisposition to spread so far. He had hurried to Brussels to consult a great authority,—a great name, at least! He had learnt that he was suffering from inflammation, possibly a tumour—a *what*, great God?—yes, probably a tumour. Oh, nothing to be alarmed at, Monsieur le Marquis.

“But my habits, my daily—ahem!—duties. How, with your ridiculous diet of slops, can I go out to dinner, as I am accustomed to do five days of the seven? And the little suppers which—enfin!—which occur in the existence of a man of the world? I should have to be very ill, indeed, and I am not, before I could submit to such a life as you propose.”

“Monsieur le Marquis, you are not very ill, but you are ill enough to render my régime absolutely imperative. Absolutely imperative.”

“Is my illness dangerous?”

“Not yet.”

“Ah! But, professor, are you not mistaken about

the tumour? The fool who prescribed for me has allowed a chill to settle down into a chronic catarrh. A friend of mine has much the same symptoms as myself, and he suffers from a chronic catarrh."

"Monsieur le Marquis, I am sorry to say, you must not treat this affection too lightly. I will not answer for the consequences if you do."

Of how little importance it all seemed to him now. A week ago it had come upon him as the greatest catastrophe of his life. To have something serious the matter with one—well, not exactly serious, but "requiring care." To have to change one's whole mode of life—for a time, of course, on one's body's account. How vexatious! And he was only seventy-three, while Prasly-Latour had celebrated his eighty-seventh birthday last August in perfect health. The fates were unjust.

All this was vague, and far-away. His whole previous existence was but a thin dash, as a prelude, leading up to yesterday, a blot, a full-stop.

After two more attacks of fierce spasms he had made up his mind to know what was really wrong. Why this constant giddiness? Was his brain diseased also? He would go into a foreign country, where he would be free to speak. Amsterdam was close by; some-one had recommended a professor at Amsterdam, who had cured somebody else of a swelling somewhere. He went to Amsterdam.

Why had he insisted upon this man's laying bare the whole truth? He did not really want to know it. He would much rather not have known it. Oh the

blessed ignorance of yesterday morning! Oh the blessed cruel doubt of yesterday morning! Oh the happiness of that torturing: Is it? compared with this irrevocable: "It is."

He had come out from that chamber of judgment with but one idea: Escape. Anywhere, away from the truth, from himself. Not back to old acquaintances, familiar faces, how are you's—I hope you're better; come and dine. Anywhere, into some quiet corner, unknown, to hide his suffering in a hole, like a cat or a dog. It was chance that had prevented his going farther than Deynum. He had intended to push on — somewhere — into Germany, miscalculating his strength.

He knew little of illness, but of *this* illness he knew. He had seen it take its course in his wife. Yet, he now told himself, her symptoms had been so different. All the preliminaries of his own case had been omitted; only the final agony had come, sharp and swift. It never occurred to him what she might have endured in silence. He cursed his fate which dealt more hardly with him.

He shuddered. The horror of a continuous, hopeless agony was upon him. Nonsense, he was exaggerating. She had not really suffered so much. She seldom complained. He did not remember any very terrible paroxysms. And yet he had received a general impression, from doctors and nurses, from occasional sights and sounds—still, he may have exaggerated. He regretted that he had not asked her oftener about her sufferings. He would have known better now.

There were maladies in which you suffered more than in cancer. There must be. He tried to think of them. He might have been a life-long leper, like his friend, the Duke. He tried to feel thankful that he had not been a life-long leper.

He broke into a horrible laugh. And then again he took up the book. For *one* thing he was thankful, that last night had come to an end, and that it was day again, wet and miserable, but day.

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## CHAPTER X.

## A SHEPHERD AND TWO SHEEP.

MEANWHILE Antoine wandered disconsolately to and fro in the solitary village-street, his trousers turned-up to an unnecessary degree, his shiny umbrella dripping low over his bended shoulders.

"Ah, your turn has come at last, has it, old ten per cent.?" he murmured over and over again, with quiet glee. "Great lords kick everybody under them, and the greatest lord is Death," he chuckled. He had an unpleasant way of chuckling internally, with melancholy, long-drawn face. The idea of the impending catastrophe appeared to afford him distinct satisfaction. He gave it utterance, letting it linger on his tongue, like a lozenge, as an antidote against the damp.

He stopped to stare along the deserted road.

"A pretty name," he said, speaking of the village. "And, for the rest, beastly—like many a girl."

Meditating thus, in a manner worthy of his philosophic mind, he dribbled down a little lane, which seemed to lead nowhere. "In ten minutes more I shall go back," he resolved, "and shall tell the old fellow anything he may care to believe. What's the use of his stupid questions? To-morrow, at the latest, we move on."

At this moment an energetic tapping caused him to lift the umbrella off his ears. He had reached a low tenement which stands well-hid behind an overcrowded strip of garden, winking, as it were, with one eye over a tall box-hedge. If you look at it closely, you will see that it is a little more pretentious than its—distant—neighbours in its simple unpretentiousness. It is larger and, if possible, neater, and one or two concessions have been made in erecting it to other considerations than those of the barest utility. "Erecting" is an incorrect word; it lies prone beneath the trees. And just now it was a thing of most wondrous beauty to gaze upon, for the whole irregular length of its mixed up apartments and out-houses was ablaze, like a magnificent sunset, with the all-luminous death of a great Virginia creeper. Antoine saw nothing of this, not even the glittering eaves, till he had found a little gate to peep through.

"Presumably meant for me," he said. "Whoever she is, she must be hurting her hand. I hope she's young."

The knocking increased in energy.

"I fear not," sighed Antoine, still peering under his umbrella. "No woman under forty would knock as loud as that."

The knocking ceased and a portly figure in black appeared at the door, a low door, half-hidden under a porch. The figure was making signs with a pipe, across the mists of rain.

"An old one, of course; like my luck," grumbled Antoine, who was near-sighted (ocularly only). "Well,

a glass of cognac will not come amiss this damp morning."

"Push it!" shouted Father Bulbius in Dutch, with violent gestures of both arms and the pipe. Then he cried: "Pussy!" which is French and means the same thing.

"Yes, you may yell, old lady," muttered Antoine, violently jerking the recalcitrant latch. "Hang this gate; it's as virtuous as a Mother Superior. Hi, you there, you must come and let me in, if you want me at all!"

He desisted. Whereupon Bulbius, with a mighty resolve, in which courtesy and curiosity triumphed over caution, hitched up his cassock as high as was permissible—a little higher—and, holding it resolutely out on both sides, with the pipe sticking cross-ways, commenced a gingerly zigzag over the puddles.

"Black!" soliloquized Antoine. "A widow presumably. Well, widows take most trouble. Here she comes. It is the mountain, evidently, on its way to Mahomed. It is—Good Heavens, it is a curé. In this land of all others! But do not derange yourself, Monsieur le Curé!" Then he stood aside, bowing and scraping. "This is Veronica's doing!" gasped Father Bulbius, dropping the skirt he had tucked between his knees, as he rattled at the gate. "She has locked it again."

Even as he spoke, another figure, gaunt and terrible, appeared in the doorway, and a big bass voice came booming through the wet. "Is it possible, your Reverence, with your baldness! Is it permissible thus to risk one's health? Ah but return immediately! Immediately!



Besides, it is useless, for *I* have got the key!" And Veronica, the Father's housekeeper (and body-guard) came stalking across with straight, upright jerks like a squirrel.

"Murder will out," snapped Veronica, "but I say: Murder will in. Leastways theft." She unlocked the little gate with the very big key which she held in one bony hand. "Is this—person to come in, your Reverence?"

"Certainly, unless you have left the table loaded with plate," replied the Father, with a timid attempt to banter her.

"There are other valuables besides plate," retorted the woman, with a toss of her head. "You're nearest to your own skin, says the proverb, and I'm sure there's no one else to be near to in this loneliest of lanes."

The priest pushed her aside, a little impatiently for him. "Enterrez-vous, Mesjeu?" he said with a polite wave of his hand. The movement drove his long pipe backwards, causing Veronica to start away with a snort and a splash.

"Shall I not derange you, Monsieur l'Abbé?" protested Antoine, bowing bare-headed, but under his umbrella, wherein he distinctly had the advantage of Bulbius.

"Oh no; I am not at all deranged," replied the latter gentleman, and led the way into the house.

"My good Veronica," he said, pausing at the door of his den, "I should like a half-bottle of port."

"There is no more port, your Reverence, and it

seems to me that for a man who has been out in the damp, a good cup of coffee——”

“Yes, yes,” said the Father, gently closing the door of his sanctum upon her—and motioning his guest to a chair.

There was not, however, a vacant one in the whole little room. From top to bottom the Parsonage was a model of primness and cleanly discomfort, angular, empty, white and cold, with that eternal smell of polish and soap and ubiquitously slippery sloppery in which the soul of the Dutch housewife delights. But to the rule of this general unhabitability one exception had perforce been established. The priest had made a stand with regard to his own little study. On the first day of the month he permitted his housekeeper to enter and “clean” it, deserting it himself during twenty-four hours. When this compromise was proposed to her as the result of long weeks of battle, ruse and subterfuge, Veronica first resigned her post, and then, as the Father remained unexpectedly firm, herself. She found some consolation in ceaselessly ascribing all the ailments she invented for him to the unhealthy condition of his apartment. And, seeing that an indolent man always makes far more litter than a busy one, the sanctum, as inspected from outside the window, must have caused agony to a swept and straightened mind like Veronica’s. Father Bulbius never picked up anything,—and he had an aptitude for letting things fall,—nor did he ever replace a book, or whatever else he had taken down, unless there was an opportunity for putting it sideways, or topsy-turvy.

He now hurried to an easy chair—all his chairs

bore that name, and deserved it—and, knocking off a dusty pile of newspapers with one hand, while he hastily passed a slip of his cassock across the seat with the other, he apologised in broken French for the delay. Then he waddled to a cupboard, from which he carefully extracted a quart bottle and two small glasses. These he held up to the window with a smile on his broad face which seemed to pour a sudden flood of sunshine over the rain-oppressed little room.

"You are doubtless," he said, "the stranger of yesterday. I was anxious to afford you, sir, a shelter from the wet. I regret that circumstances rendered this difficult." He stammered out his words under a hailstorm of mistakes, but we will not delay ourselves with the mistakes and stammerings of others.

"I am the servant," said Antoine humbly, "of Monsieur Farjolle."

"I know. That is what I meant," replied the Father hastily, filling the glasses. "I have some decent cognac here. In spite of my housekeeper's objections, I occasionally take a little as a remedy against the damp."

Loripont was amazed by the quality of the liquor. Trust a gentleman's gentleman to know. But the truth is, Father Bulbius loved good tobacco, good drinks and good humour. For the rest, the world might wag as it listed. And the worst thing in it to wag was his housekeeper's tongue.

"Monsieur your master, he is better this morning, I hope?"

"He is very ill, Monsieur le Curé," said Antoine solemnly.

"So I hear. So I hear," murmured the Priest, mournfully shaking his fat chin over his elevated glass. "I hope, my dear friend, that——" he hesitated. He was going to say "that he is prepared," but he felt this to be still too early a stage of their interview—"that you approve of the brandy," he said.

"It is most excellent, Monsieur le Curé."

"We owe it, like most good wines, to your beautiful country, Monsieur," said the Father, lovingly rocking the golden liquid against the light.

Antoine was silent. His master had expressly commanded him to disguise their nationality. Belgium is so small and so close by.

"For you are a Frenchman, I presume?" added Bulbuis.

"I am a Belgian, Monsieur le Curé," replied Antoine, who could lie to anybody on earth, excepting to a priest.

"A Belgian——ah!" The Father paused, apprehensive of a presence at the door.

"Here is the coffee," came from the passage in sepulchral tones. "Will your Reverence take it, as I am not permitted to intrude?" And a tray was propelled through the narrowest aperture imaginable, with a brusqueness which gave to the very cups an attitude of defiance, as they jumped to the jerk.

"Nice warm coffee," said Bulbuis meekly, in closing the door.

Loripont dropped a scrutatory glance through the depths of the too transparent liquid, which glance went down deep into the Father's heart.

"But she cooks with great care," replied the Father

apologetically, "the dishes she likes. She says her instinct advises her what is wholesome. My instinct"—his eyes twinkled—"is invariably wrong, she says. But this is ungracious," he cried suddenly, "and, to a stranger, offensive. It is right I should not care too much about eating, and Veronica's peculiarities, I trust, will be looked upon up yonder"—he pointed to the ceiling—"as something of an excuse for the quality of *this*"—he ticked his fat finger against his glass.

"But your Reverence is very comfortable here," replied Antoine, a little ironically. "I see you have farm-buildings attached."

"Ah, that was unavoidable. I have to occupy my housekeeper. If you are married, you will know that a woman devotes at least all her spare time to her neighbours' affairs. A dangerous quality in the house of a parish priest. Veronica is always complaining that she has too much to do. So she has, although, by-the-bye, she insisted on getting the cows, when I was ordered fresh milk. It is necessary that she should have too much to do. And, besides, the grievance keeps her in a pleasantly bad temper. She would not, for the world, do less."

Antoine Loripont smiled. He had an immense veneration for the clergy which was altogether independent of their personal faults or peculiarities. It rested solely on the consideration that, if death should happen to be, not an *impasse*, but a passage (so he expressed it), the guards at the farther gate would wear the livery of the Pope. "Pour s'assurer une bonne place au spectacle," the fellow said brutally, "il faut avoir de bons amis dans les coulisses." And he was

superstitious, with all the superstition of a weak cynic and evil-liver.

The guest's smile recalled Father Bulbius, already half ashamed of his garrulity. But oh the splendid opportunity for pouring out pent-up grievances into patient ears that, on the morrow, would bear them hundreds of miles away! He could not have ventured to speak thus fearlessly of his "house-cross" to the family at the Castle. The smaller our world is, the larger are its ears.

"I am breaking the ninth commandment," he now confessed with rueful countenance. "And worse. In those days a man's neighbour alone was protected: it was deemed incredible that one should speak evil of those of his own house."

And to himself he added: "You who are yearning to pump this stranger, who called him in on purpose, you accuse others of being busy-bodies. Oh, Bulbius, you hypocrite, I shall punish you as you deserve." He took out a little much-faded pocket-book from beside his bulgy breast. In this little book he carefully made a little note. It was his record of penances, and whenever he realized that he had wronged a fellow-creature, he wrote down a punishment for himself in it. Let it be hastily added, for the benefit of those who feel an affection for the poor old father, that the self-inflicted penances were not overwhelmingly heavy. He did not scourge himself, for instance. He had tried it once, gently, but found that it hurt.

Loripont's keen eye watched the little book with great interest. It recalled to him his own daily dealings with the Marquis. "You have other intercourse,

however," he said. "The carriage which so kindly brought my master from the station——" And the Father's stream of chatter babbled over into another channel, and he sang the praises of Deynum and the Baronial house of Rexelaer. "An oasis," remarked Antoine, "in this wilderness infested by the Gueux."

"True," replied the Father demurely. "Yet I have known Protestants who were good men." He was not going to allow a Belgian to abuse Hollanders in his presence. "The pity is that they refuse to be converted; at least, so I have often been told. Help yourself, my friend."

"I will take a drop more of this coffee, with your Reverence's permission," replied Antoine, reaching over for the cognac-bottle and grinning in the Father's face.

Then he rose. "You will not be here for any time?" queried Bulbius, who had really got nothing out of the stranger, after all.

"Oh no, we shall probably be leaving to-night."

"But your master! He is dying. Should he have any need of spiritual comfort——"

"I grieve to say, Monsieur le Curé, that my master is an atheist and an infidel."

Father Bulbius heaved a deep sigh, as he accompanied the faithful son of the Church to the door.

In the porch Antoine stood still.

"Infidels, Monsieur le Curé, when they die, go to hell, do they not?"

The priest wagged his head to and fro. "Undoubtedly," he said—with great hesitation.

"Then my master, when he dies, will go to hell?" persisted Antoine.

"Let us hope he will not die an infidel," said Bulbius gently. "Poor fellow, you must implore the Virgin for him. You are a good man. If you stay, come and see me again."

"Your Reverence—if your Reverence has not caught cold already——" cried a sonorous voice from the kitchen.

The Father fled back to his room.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## "ENTRE L'ARBRE ET L'ECORCE."

FOR the twentieth time the Marquis laid down his book and glanced at the travelling-clock which stood ticking nervously beside him. "He does it on purpose," murmured the Marquis. "I cannot, I will not, be alone."

Even at that moment, had he known it, his solitude was coming to an end. For the landlady was stumbling upstairs in a frantic hurry, tripped up by her loose slippers as they dropped away from under her feet.

"The Landheer!" she gasped, falling over her various belongings and snapping her apron-strings. "I hope he didn't see that my back-hair's come undone."

She thumped vigorously at the door, and then—for though foreign gentlemen might be terrible possibilities, the "Landheer" was a magnificent fact,—she "irrupted" recklessly into the bedroom, crying: "The compliments of Mynheer the Baron, and his Nobleness desires to know how the strange gentleman is!"

The Marquis moved one white hand in delicate protest. "Go away," he said softly, in broken Dutch. "Go away."

Hendrika, though delighted to hear her own language, stood "struck all of a heap," as she afterwards declared, by the strange gentleman's attire. Long white robes, in her simple mind, were connected with the least dressed of undress only. Doubtless, distinguished foreigners wore such night-garments as these. "Oh la!" she said. She was an apple-faced young woman, without any figure to speak of. She fell back a step or two. "Mynheer is waiting. Please give an answer. I'll shut my eyes," said Hendrika, and suited the action to the word.

The Marquis sat staring indignantly at the uncouth, crimson-cheeked figure, which stood untidy before him, with tight-screwed eyelids and pendent arms. The woman's talk was of course incomprehensible to him; her manner made him uncomfortable. "Perhaps some sort of an idiot," he thought. "But one cannot throw things at a woman. I wish she would take herself off." And he rang the hand-bell, as a last resource, for he was neither strong enough nor sufficiently attired to move from his chair. He hoped that that summons might bring up the landlady.

It caused that personage timidly to open one eye. Whereupon, beholding the stranger's horrible expression and the uplifted hand-bell, she fled behind the door, giving the Marquis an opportunity, of which he immediately availed himself, to send half a dozen heavy articles crashing up against the panels, as the best means both of frightening her and shutting her out. Hendrika shot violently towards Antoine, and that gentleman, pitching her anyhow down the staircase, walked

into his master's presence with a sneer of questioning surprise.

"You infernal miscreant!" shrieked the old man, threatening him with the last thing he had snatched up, a big paper-knife. "How dare you leave me to be insulted by every hussy that cares to come and stare at me? Are you showing me to the village for a penny? I—I believe you would do it."

"Monsieur will be heard," retorted Loripont calmly, "by the gentleman at the foot of the staircase."

"Gentleman! What gentleman?"

"The gentleman who brought us from the station. He is asking for Monsieur le Marquis. Monsieur de Rexelaer, I presume."

"I will see him," said the Marquis, after a moment's reflection. "And you, with your everlasting clumsiness about my title, mind not to betray who I am."

But the insulted Hendrika had meanwhile conveyed to the Baron the information that the old creature upstairs was out of his mind. He had abused her and thrown things at her, and he had even refused to hear anything concerning his Nobleness the Baron. "And I should never have taken him in at all," argued the landlady, "but for your Nobleness's commands. My inn is intended for respectable people from market, not for foreigners, no one knows why, whither or whence."

"No, no, it is some misunderstanding. You will see; he will pay well," answered the Baron soothingly, as he turned away.

But Antoine stopped him and ushered him into the presence of "my master, Monsieur Farjolle." And the Angel who watches over the fortunes of Deynum looked from one face to the other in tremulous doubt. Perhaps he realised, vaguely, that this was the beginning of the end. For angels, whatever they may foresee—pure eyes are far-seeing—cannot read the future plainly. They know that God's goodness, like man's evil, is boundless; they remember the Past. But the problem, for them as for us, still remains an equation, in which the fourth quantity, the Future, is eternally marked with a cross.

"I had not intended to intrude," said the Baron, bowing stiffly.

"It were cruel to deprive me of a pleasure, Monsieur," replied the Marquis, all urbanity, motioning his visitor to one of the rush-bottomed chairs. "Have I the pleasure of speaking to Monsieur de Rexelaer de Deynum?"

"Yes, that is my name," said the Baron, with a quiet little glow of pride. He was nearly sixty; he had never learnt to suppress the feeling altogether.

"Mine is Farjolle, Monsieur le Comte."

"Ah no; pardon me," said the Baron promptly, but with an awkward blush. "That is another family altogether; they spell their name differently. Count Rexelaer is no connection of mine." He hesitated a moment. "I am Baron Rexelaer of Deynum," he said.

A complicated look of confusion, vexation and incredulity came over the Belgian's face. "Impossible," he thought. "Some quarrel. But, evidently, it's the

wrong man." Aloud he said: I have yet to thank you——" "It is nothing, it is nothing!" from the Baron—"ah, but indeed, you cannot rob me of the pleasure of being indebted to you, Monsieur le Baron."

"The old peacock will betray himself at once by his strut," soliloquised Antoine, where he stood behind his master's chair. "And why shouldn't he? It's only half a masquerade at the best, this stupid joke about Farjolle."

The Marquis turned round, as if he had understood.

"Get you downstairs," he said. "And, if there's anything edible in the house, you may eat it."

"Then," said the simple-hearted Baron, "Why not increase so trivial a pleasure by accepting the hospitality of my house till you can proceed on your travels?"

The Marquis's face clouded with the painful memory of the last word. "There will not be much more travelling," he said, "I thank you sincerely, Monsieur. But I am too ill to be anyone's guest." An ashen pallor lay over his sharp features. He had aged since yesterday. The chin seemed lengthening out upwards, as if striving to come in contact with the eagle-nose. Yet he had fixed in his teeth as usual that morning, and they fitted as well as ever.

"On that very account——" began the Baron, "but I do not press you, though our worst, simple people as we are, would be better than this." He swept his arm round the room. "Besides, it is hardly worth your while perhaps. I hope you are feeling well enough to continue your journey."

"Excuse me; I am not going to continue my journey. I am going to stay here."

The Baron stared in undisguised amazement. His frank eyes somewhat disconcerted the man of the world.

"I was not on my way to any place in particular," continued the Marquis hastily. "Mine was a journey of—pleasure. I was looking for a quiet spot in which to—rest. This seems a charming one."

"It is indeed," acquiesced the Baron emphatically.

"Just so. Do you know—perhaps—of some small furnished house I could hire in the village? Excuse my troubling you with my private affairs. For the moment I cannot travel. Nor can I remain in this room——" with an expression of extreme disgust.

The Baron sat thinking for a few moments, an earnest desire to be of use distinctly marked on his manly face. Then he looked up with an eager smile of satisfaction. "I have an idea," he said, "I must go and inquire." And he hurried away, without waiting for the other's premature gratitude. On the staircase he looked at his watch. "I mustn't keep Gertrude waiting lunch," he thought.

Two hours later he appeared at the Parsonage and, receiving no answer to his knock, walked straight through, into his Reverence's study.

"His Reverence is in bed," said a deep voice behind the intruder. It was the worst part of Veronica's tyranny that she showered verbal reverence upon the victim, out of season, and out of sense.

"Ill? Dear me, he was well enough last night."

"*And* came home in the rain," replied Veronica, impressively. There was reproach in her eye.

"But *with* an umbrella," expostulated the Baron.

"Umbrellas are no protection against the underdamp," retorted Veronica enigmatically. "The underdamp is especially dangerous to fat men. It rises alongside the thin ones, but it strikes against the fat men and upsets them."

"Humph!" said the Baron. "Well!" And he pushed deliberately past her. Veronica followed grumbling. She feared no one on earth where her priest was concerned, but, still, the Lord of Deynum was—the Lord of Deynum.

The Baron opened the bedroom door, and, as he did so, a scramble was heard and the thud of something heavy collapsing into something soft. Father Bulbius was discovered in bed, the clothes pulled up tight under his double chin, his face melting with heat and more purple than ever.

Veronica came stalking after the visitor. "Is it comfortable, your Reverence?" she inquired with solemn interest.

"No," replied the Father without looking up. "It hurts." There was resentment in his tone. He was actually sulky.

"So it ought to, if it's to draw out the cold"—but at this stage the Baron bundled out the handmaid—with his eyes—and closed the door behind her.

"Had you not better lock it, Mynheer the Baron?" suggested a faint voice from the bed.

No sooner had this hint found acceptance than Father Bulbius threw off the bed-clothes and sat erect. With an almost piteous "By your leave," he removed a sticky yellow mass from his ample breast and laid it

beside him on the pillow. The Baron stood watching. "I cannot understand you," the latter burst out wrathfully. "It is indeed time that I renewed my oft-repeated proposal to deliver you. In fact I am here with that object. Send the woman away and come and live with us."

"But I *have* got a cold," protested the Father, turning in immediate self-defence. "I sneezed twice, I assure you, before I got into bed, of my own free will."

"Then put on your plaster again," replied the Baron grimly, "I shan't squeeze my hand twixt the beech and the bark. But my advice is: send the woman away." He hesitated a moment; then he said abruptly, "You give up this place, which you and she are always declaring unhealthy and declaiming against, and you come and live at the Castle, as you have often said you would like to do. It is a deliverance, my good Bulbius."

The parsonage, properly speaking, of Deynum was a poor little house near the church; the Chaplain who served the Castle-chapel had always lived with the family. The Protestant minister came across from the village of Rollingen.

"And where would Veronica go to?" queried the Priest.

"To the——," the Baron checked himself. "To her relations. Isn't she always telling you that she ought really to leave you and attend to some old creature at home?"

"Ah yes, but she merely says that because she wants to have the old lady here. Veronica has a



venerable great-aunt of ninety-three, so deaf she can hear nobody's voice but Veronica's. Veronica certainly has a splendid voice. And perhaps I am rather selfish"—this ruefully—"but"—with sudden triumph—"you see, I *don't* have her, Mynheer the the Baron, which proves that I possess a will of my own."

"Then use it, and come to the Castle."

"It is most kind, but I could not expect it of Veronica."

"I have an opportunity now, such as will never occur again, to rid you of lease, furniture and all."

"You tempt me sorely, Mynheer the Baron, but just think of Veronica."

"Oh, I'll settle Veronica," cried the Baron, and ran from the room.

Father Bulbius sank back, smiling contentedly, on his pillow. But, almost simultaneously, he started up with a shriek. And his bald head, as he hastily removed the burning mess into which he had dropped it, shone like a lobster through its sauce.

"Veronica, I hear you are anxious to return to your relations?" cried the Baron, suddenly appearing in the kitchen.

The old housekeeper was busy among her pots and pans. In fact, she was preparing another plaster. She turned round very slowly. "I never said so, Mynheer the Baron," she answered, more slowly still. "Did his Reverence?"

The Baron was a little taken aback by the solemnity of her manner. "Oh come," he protested. "And there's your aunt, you know, who is ninety-seven, and

who can hear no voice but yours. You have undoubtedly a very fine voice, my good Veronica."

"Mynheer the Baron is very kind. My great-aunt is barely ninety-one. Has your Nobleness a candidate for my place with his Reverence?"

"His Reverence is coming to live at the Castle. This house, which is so unhealthy, is going to be let."

Veronica slowly put down the plaster which had lain steaming in her hands. "Not like that," she said, and her deep tones sounded like the distant roll of thunder. "Excuse me, Mynheer the Baron, but I can't believe it of his Reverence. Not this house. Not like that."

"And why not this house?" inquired the Baron impatiently. "You've grumbled enough at it for years."

She turned upon him almost fiercely. "And you, Mynheer the Baron, would you sell Deynum?"

He did not deign to answer her impudence directly. He only said: "And your aunt, whom it is your Christian duty to look after? And your master, whom the damp is killing, you say?"

She started, and, for a moment, a swift tremble shook her. "True," she said, and marched straight past the Baron into Bulbius's room. She entered so quickly that the invalid had not time to replace his catapasm.

"It is true," she began abruptly, "that the damp is bad for your Reverence. It is especially bad for fat people because of the 'underdamp.' The 'wonder-doctor' told me who cured my aunt of her fidgets. So I know. And my grand-aunt wants me badly, and you'll be more comfortable at the Castle. And the Baron is right."

"Nonsense, Veronica," murmured Bulbius in a shrill whisper from among the bedclothes. "Shut the door. Do you mean to say you have told the Baron you are willing to go?"

"So be it. He is right."

"Fiddlesticks. And who will attend to my requirements as you do? I love the people at the Castle, but I can't go and live with them. You're the only person in the world who can cook my porridge exactly as I like it, or who can mix my grog of nights. And there's my posset after service—and—and——"

"And Flora with that calf coming," burst in Veronica. "And the pigs that won't be fit to kill for another month, at least. And there never was anyone like your Reverence for wearing holes in your black stockings, and——"

"Go and tell him that you can't," cried his Reverence. "Go and tell him immediately that you won't. There's a jewel of a woman! Go and tell him that *you won't*."

"But he'll think I'm grudging your Reverence a healthier residence."

"But he'll misunderstand my refusal to enter his family."

"So be it," said Veronica again, and marched to the door.

Before she reached it, it was opened from the outside by the Baron van Rexelaer. That gentleman had tired of the saucepans. "So you see, Father, it's all settled," he said.

"No, I cannot, Mynheer the Baron," Veronica was beginning heroically; but Bulbius, brought face to

face with the crisis, arose in his bed, and to the occasion.

"It is settled that we decline your kind offer," he said. "There are too many objections. And I do not think I could manage without Veronica."

"Your Reverence," exclaimed the Baron vehemently, "is a child and a slave. There, there; you may forgive me to-morrow. You won't think better of it? No, really? Then keep on your house for that woman. Good-bye."

He ran away in a rage. He was mightily offended. Veronica stood watching him from the porch. "And you might as well sell Deynum? Why don't you?" she said when she thought he was out of hearing. But she had miscalculated the strength of her splendid voice.

The poor Father, much perturbed by his patron's displeasure, drew his little book of penances from under his pillow and made a note in it. The plaster, endured from simple good-nature, was a point to the good. "It is true," he said to himself, "that I am ridiculously susceptible to wet feet. And Veronica really takes most excellent care of me. On Sundays, especially, she is altogether tractable, but it cannot always be Sunday." Then he yawned, and got out of bed, and wondered what Veronica would say to that.

But she said nothing, when she came in presently, with red eyes.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE HEIRESS AND HER SQUIRE.

THE Baron's anger had cooled somewhat before he reached the little postern which leads from the bottom of the lane into his own park. He walked slower, having started with a run. And his footsteps suddenly died into stillness on the sodden leaves which filled up the narrow by-path, as he wound slowly forward into a wilderness of russet and gold. Evening was falling, with that tearful sadness which often heralds an autumn sunset, and the pale sky was visibly growing gray and blurred above the sharp outlines of the fading trees.

His own trees. He knew them, individually. You cannot understand, unless you have had trees yourself. They possessed faces with which they met his eyes, in every change of joy or sorrow. He knew them as the colonel of a regiment knows, or should know, his numerous men. He always had a ready approval for the fine fellows that did their work bravest, budding early and blooming late, but also a gentle thought of indulgence for the weak ones, the stragglers, and an understanding that their lesser beauties were not so much the result of evil intention as an accident of circumstance or place.

He stopped to-day before an old oak, far-spreading and stately, but dead at the top. He eyed it lovingly. It stood, sombre, and lonely, in a little clearing, bordered by a curve of lighter trees. He remembered how it had begun to decay in his father's time, and what an outcry there had been when the fact was first discovered. He might have recalled annual conversations with his steward always in the same stereotype form. "It will do as it is for the present, Dievert." "Yes, Mynheer the Baron." "It is a pity that this particular tree should take to going." "So it is; so it is, Mynheer the Baron." From time immemorial—to the villagers—it had been called "Lady Bertha's Oak," because of the little daughter of the house who, climbing recklessly up into its bosom, had been caught, as she slipped, in the arms of a fair, sad lady that must have been the Blessed Virgin herself, and borne safely to the ground. The little Freule Bertha had seen and declared it; it was written in a fifteenth-century parchment that lay emblazoned in the archives of the family, and a weather-beaten cross, with a faint 1474 marked upon it, still leans crooked and moss-eaten in this secluded corner of the park.

"It will last my time," said the Baron, turning away from the tree. He wandered along, sadly meditating that no Blessed Virgin was likely to spread her arms out under his little Wendela's threatening fall. Ah, those were brave old days when the Saints were still especially interested in us gentry.

"But it's not as bad as that yet," said the Baron, shaking off his gloomy thoughts. "With Strum's help I shall find money for the mortgages. I daresay my

primary object with Bulbius was selfish. I should have let the house at a far higher price to this Monsieur de Farjolle, or perhaps sold it. Dear me, I wonder now whether I had thought of that?"

Somebody was moving in the brushwood. He turned to the slight rustle, attentive, as country-gentlemen are. You might find a stray pheasant here occasionally, but it was too early in the day for poachers. The man came slouching along, one of his own labourers. The Baron stopped, slowly remembering, as the rustic saluted him. "Your little boy better this evening, Sam?" "Yes, thank you, Landheer. He's but poorly, thank you. And we remain humbly thankful to Mynheer for the broth." The broth was his wife's doing. He met her, as he turned into a broader avenue, a basket on her arm and their little daughter by her side.

"Well, and have you succeeded, mon ami?" asked the Baroness, his confidante in this as in all other matters, but one.

"No, indeed," cried the Baron, with a sudden rekindling of his wrath. "The man is a fool!" And he savagely struck at the lemon-coloured leaves of a chestnut which hung drooping perpendicularly from their stem.

"Be silent," said the Baroness in English. Her pale eyes lighted with reproof. "How can you, Reinout, speak in that manner, and before the child, of a priest?"

The Baron was eloquent in no language, least of all in English. He walked on in silence, and presently held out his hand to his daughter, who took it gravely,

without a change in her brown eyes. She drew it against her mother's white woolly shawl. "Isn't it nice and soft?" she said.

They came in sight of the house. The chill avenue widened out gradually to a clear tract of grass, on which the dark forms of browsing deer moved indistinct beneath the drooping twilight. Against the far horizon the park began afresh, a great half-circle, black beneath the slaty sky, but illumined, at one point, by a steady crimson flare, where the weak sun had sunk away. In the distant foreground, beyond the meadow, spread the brown mass of the Castle, enclosed by a moat whose current, invisible here, shone dully a little farther off. The sombre brick-work rose naked from the water, a confused mass of buttresses and excrescences, with a great square tower and a couple of smaller round ones, all jumbled up together under a fanciful tracery of weather-cocks, peaks and flourishes, and a-glimmer in the shimmer of its countless dull-blue windows and its topmost ball of Atlas against the dying light.

"How cold it is getting!" said the Baroness. "We stayed too long with Mother Bosman. She is sinking fast."

Wendela had lagged behind to stare after a long-vanished squirrel.

"Are you sure," questioned the Baron, waveringly, "that it is quite advisable to take the child to see old women die?"

"Most decidedly. She cannot too soon learn the responsibilities of her future position. Besides, she is no longer so young. She will soon be admitted to the



Communion at the same altar where one of her ancestresses stood up to be married at her age."

"Betrothed, my dear. Elizabeth van Rexelaer was fourteen when she married. And those were other days."

"We are never too young to become acquainted with suffering, if our lot be cast among the great in this world," said Mevrouw van Rexelaer. "When I was twelve, my dear mother lay dying of consumption, and I was her only nurse."

"But, then, you had always a most remarkable character," said the Baron from the bottom of his heart.

They had paused by the bridge which leads to the courtyard, a brick courtyard with a stone road down and round it, nasty for horses in slippery weather. Tubbed orange-trees stand here during the brief months of a northern summer, in stately lines across the square and up the wide stone steps. Some of these orange-trees are said to be two hundred years old. They are giants to move, twice a year, with much groaning and creaking. And successive Baronesses have worn a sprig of their blossom in bridal wreaths, and afterwards dutifully made preserve of their fruits every summer, until the Baronesses themselves, in their turn, were soldered into leaden cases, with their faded bit of orange-blossom, and all their hopes and fears, to be hidden away in the vault under the chapel. Ill-luck to the bride who neglected the orange-trees; the White Baroness's own marriage had been delayed till the flowers came out.

"I have something still that I wish to see about," murmured the Baron, pausing on the bridge.

"But, mon ami, why do you always run out into the sunset? Come within. It is the worst time of day."

"No, no; I have things of importance to attend to." He turned away quickly, then, recollecting himself, came back after his wife, and led her across the dusk of the courtyard and kissed her hand upon the steps.

"Why is it, Reinout?" she asked abruptly. "What?"

"One worries sometimes about the mortgages. It is nothing."

The lady sighed. "Wanda!" she cried. "Where is Wanda?"

"She has lagged behind. I will send her to you." He went back under the shadow of the great black walls. By the bridge he met his daughter. "Go in to your mother, Wanda," he said.

"But I want to come with you, Papa."

"Oh no. Go in immediately." He disappeared into the darkness of the trees. The Bourse was long over; the day's quotations were in print and would presently reach him. Nevertheless was he anxious to kneel at the altar before he went on to "The Mountain." He did not reason about these things. Nor do you.

"I, when I am grown up, I shall do as I like," said Wendela to herself in French. Not a child that was ever born but has found comfort in those delightful words, since little Cain first muttered them, when his mother ordered him to put on his furs again. Even Abel must have thought them.

"I, when I am grown up, I shall do as I like," said

Wendela. Then she added "without being naughty," and ran away in the wake of her father. She did not, however, follow him into the chapel, a pardonable divergence when it is remembered how frequently she was obliged to accompany the Baroness thither. She branched down a lane which leads to the kitchen-garden and orchards and, when she got close to the garden-wall, she gave a shrill whistle, a most unladylike thing to do.

The whistle was answered, and a small boy's form loomed out of the darkness, on the top of the wall.

"Are you there, Piet?"

"See I am, Freule."

"Why don't you say 'Wendela,' Piet?"

"'Cause you're twelve now. I told you I should never say 'Wendela' again."

"There! you've said it."

"Never. I told you so on your birthday. You know I did, when I brought you the peaches."

"You stole the peaches, Piet."

"I tell you I didn't. I worked for them with Father. I never stole anything in my life. It's mean of you to say that again."

"And I didn't eat them. I wouldn't 'cause you wouldn't say 'Wanda.' You remember, Piet, I threw them away."

"I know you did. It wasn't nice of you, Freule. I'd worked for them real hard, three half-holidays."

"Well, say 'good evening, Wanda,' now."

"I shan't. Don't worry, Freule. You're too big."

"Oh you rude boy. I wish I were bigger, and I'd hit you."

"You can hit me now if you like. I'll come down. I don't mind being hit by a girl."

"You don't mind 'cause you think I shouldn't hurt you. But I should. You're afraid of being hit by your father."

"That's not true, Freule. I don't care when Father hits me."

"Well, then, get me a pear. One of the French ones."

"I won't, Freule. I tell you, I don't steal."

Wendela blushed scarlet in the dark. "I don't want you to steal," she said hotly. "What a horrid boy you are! Ain't I the heiress of Deynum?"

"And don't I tell you this year's pears ain't next year's pears? When you're the lady of Deynum, you may kill yourself, eating pears."

"So I shall, if my husband's as bad as you are."

"Oh, stop that. We left off being husband and wife three years ago."

"But people *can't* leave off being husband and wife, unless they're 'Gueux.' Mamma says so. You wouldn't be a 'beggar,' Piet?"

"No," cried Piet Poster with great vehemence, kicking his feet against the wall.

"Well, if you leave off being my husband, you must be. You are. You are."

"Don't call me a 'beggar,' Freule. If you do, I'd almost——"

"Almost what——?"

Piet Poster clenched his fists behind his back. "I'm going away," he said.

But this was not what the little lady wanted. "I

won't say it again," she cried. "Look here, Piet, when we're grown up, I shall really marry you, and then you'll be lord of Deynum. You'd like that, wouldn't you? And then you could scold your father."

"All right. What'll the Baron say?"

"Oh—oh—oh! I say, Piet, I didn't come to talk about that. I came to tell you about his Reverence."

"What about his Reverence?" asked Piet in a reverential tone.

"He knows."

"What about? The—the cats—the——!"

"No, about his cap."

"I say! Who told him? How did he find out?"

"I told. I couldn't help it."

"Oh you sneak."

"I tell you I couldn't help it. And it was such fun. You should have seen his face!"

"Well, I didn't see it, so it's no fun to me. I think it was rightdown mean of you, Freule. We shan't be able to have any more bets." He spoke in a very disgusted tone, and began slipping down from the wall.

"Piet! Listen, Piet! I shouldn't have wagered again, anyway. I think it's wrong"—this last rather hypocritically.

"You! I was thinking of the boys. Good-night, Freule."

"I say, Piet! you won't tell I told?"

"Tell! No. You'd better be going home. It's getting dark, and you'll be afraid."

"You need not be rude as well as unkind," replied Wendela, moving off in dignified displeasure. She

turned back for a parting shot. "Telling lies is every bit as bad as stealing," she cried, and was gone without saying "Good-night."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## BARONIAL BUSINESS.

NEXT morning Nicholas Strum, the Deynum lawyer, was ushered into the Baron's private room—a lofty, empty chamber with bare Gothic windows, its wainscoted walls hung with trophies and implements of shooting and fishing. It opens out of the library. The Baron was not a reading man.

The Strums have always been the notaries of Deynum, from the beginning—that is to say, of the Strums. There has been a time, of course, when there were Rexelaers but no notaries. Ever since there were notaries at all, however, the Barons van Rexelaer have been married and buried under the legal surveillance of an Andrew or a Nicholas Strum. The present man was Nicholas. The Baron had preferred Andrew.

Andrew had been old, very old, from his earliest youth, and slow, ponderously slow—benignant, bare-headed, broad and bow-backed, absolutely reliable. Nicholas was tall and heavy, lanky, lumpy, and loutish. But Nicholas was clever. He had been born in a stand-up collar, and his mother had always admired whatever he said and did. His father had shaken a massive head over the boy's shrewdness. But that did not hurt Nicholas, who admired himself even more

than his mother admired him. Andrew was dead. Nicholas was very much alive.

There were various reasons why the Baron should dislike Nicholas. One of these was what *Mevrouw van Rexelaer* styled the "lawyer's brazen infidelity." The Strums, of course, had always been zealous Roman Catholics, but, Andrew having sent his son to the University of Louvain so as to keep him free from contamination, the young man's innate spirit of contradiction had there, under the influence of rampant ultramontaniam, developed an indifference to matters religious which had branded him at home as a "liberal Catholic," a creature almost unknown in the Netherlands. Originally the man had only wanted to go his way in peace, but the conventional horror of impiety and liberalism all around him fast drove him towards radicalism and irreligion. He was sick of the cult of "the Powers that be," in spite of his personal respect for the Baron. And the Rexelaers, on their part, would have preferred to break with this un-Strum-like Strum, had they seen their way to doing so. "How can pence develop into pounds," asked the Baroness, "in the hands of a man who does not believe in miracles?" "How indeed?" said the Baron. "You may well put that question here." And he smiled, by himself, as he always had to, at his sad little joke.

"Sit down, Strum," said the Baron.

Strum sat down and gathered his long legs about him. The Notary possessed, quite unconsciously, two manners which had but one quality in common. He was either voluble and insolent, as soon as he felt that he had got the upper hand, or silent and awkward,

when in the presence of a stronger power. In both cases he was rude, often chiefly from shyness, for shyness lay at the core of this big, unemotional-looking lump. You required but to watch his timid, spectacled eyes to see that. He had been polite, according to his lights, to Count Rexelaer, a possible patron. He was always especially volubly insolent to the Baron, from a fear of becoming too servile, like his father, and also from a lawyer's natural contempt of financial embarrassment.

"Well?" said the Baron, after a moment's expectant silence. He coughed uncomfortably.

Strum coughed uncomfortably. Then he broke out suddenly, with the abruptness of a popgun.

"Your Nobleness has received my letter?" The Baron took up from his writing-table a paper, which he had been fingering all the while.

"Of course," he said; "it came up last night. But why write? Your father never wrote to me in his life, Nicholas. And, besides, the letter tells me nothing. Difficulties about renewing the mortgage! Why? Which? It is a couple of months yet before the question need arise." He was very agitated already. He was one of those men whom the very mention of "business" agitates. Not having grown up within its inner circle, they have learnt by experience that for outsiders all "business" practically comes to legalized spoliation. And the outsider never understands the trick till it's done.

"I wrote," said Strum, "immediately after my final interview with the Hague bankers. The stakes are too momentous; the sum is too large." He jerked forward



his out-lying foot with a great thump at nothing. "We can't wait till the latest moment which is often a moment too late, as my dead father used to say." He always quoted his dead father to—or rather against—the Baron van Rexelaer.

"I miss him every day of my life, Mynheer the Baron," he continued—a mere nervous overflow of talk—"But most of all in these great transactions with regard to Deynum. I miss him very much."

"So do I," said the Baron, with very different conviction. "Come to the point, Strum, please. Surely four and a half is a sufficient rate of interest."

"The interest is high enough," began Strum, "they would probably renew for less——"

"Then why bother me?" cried the Baron with a gasp of relief.

The young Notary made a deprecatory movement with his left hand, ere he proceeded to crack its fingers with his right.

"Had they not made up their mind not to renew at all," he said. He drew away his broad lips to his ears as he spoke, revealing a set of irregular yellow teeth. The movement had nothing of a grin in it, it was a mere muscular twitch which gave his face an expression as if he were going to swallow you.

"The risk is immense," he went on hastily. "The estate, valuable as it is, cannot bear the continued depreciation of land. They will sell while they can and the sooner the better. For them and for everybody, I should say." He spoke blusteringly. He was every jot as ill at ease as the Baron.

"Your dear departed father used to say, Nicholas,"

remarked a low, grave voice behind him, "that the man who does business for gentlemen should always be a gentleman himself." The Baroness, smooth and colourless in her laces, had entered noiselessly through the library-door.

"Chère amie, chère amie," expostulated the Baron, "leave me and Strum"—yes; he said "me and Strum"—"to settle these matters between us."

The Notary was boiling internally, but he only boiled over in drops. "Mevrouw," he said, with a great crack of his curved thumb, "it would be a good thing for all parties, if there were no business to be transacted at Deynum. But the fact remains, Mynheer the Baron, that the mortgages will not be renewed, and that the whole immense sum of money must be found, which, of course, is impossible."

"How do you know what is possible or impossible?" asked the Baron haughtily.

"Only in so far as your man of business can judge."

"You are that, but not my confidant."

"I should be neither or both, Mynheer the Baron, as my father used to say."

"He never said it of you, Nicholas," interrupted the Baroness. She had been standing watching his clumsy twitches with pallid contempt. She now moved away to a window-seat. Her vague eyes rested on the distant park. They drew her husband's in the same direction. He had not the strength to remonstrate again.

Nicholas bit his lips. He thought he could manage the Baron, but he was afraid of the lady, whom he cordially disliked.

"Of course, if the money will be forthcoming, so much the better," he said. "In that case I need not further trouble you with the object of my visit, which was an offer I received yesterday."

"What offer?" asked the Baron, a little shame-facedly. Strum closed his eyes behind his big round spectacles. "The bank informs me that an excellent opportunity occurs—of which it would be to the advantage of all parties to avail themselves—for transferring the whole of the mortgages into other hands, into private hands, as I understand."

A sudden tremor played over the Baron's face. The Baroness glanced round from the window, and then back again at the trees.

"I understand," said the Baron in a husky voice. "And that is why they refuse to renew. Who is the 'private person'?"

"No name is mentioned as yet."

"Were you aware, Strum, that I declined, a couple of days ago, the offer of a certain person at the Hague to purchase this place?"

"Yes, Mynheer the Baron."

"You were. Then you knew of the offer before it was made. Perhaps you suggested it during your stay at the Hague?" The Baron was not a good hand at irony; his voice grew louder: "It is a conspiracy," he cried, "and you are in it!"

"A conspiracy, if you like," replied Strum roughly. "I was asked my opinion as to the advisability of such a proposal, and I said: Make it, by all means. I thought it the best, the only solution of a gigantic difficulty. And I think so still. I should call this

anxiety on the part of Count Rexelaer to purchase the place a most wonderful piece of good-fortune!"

"Count Rexelaer," repeated the Baron. "Just so. You are your father's son, Nicholas, and, although you do not know as much as he did, you probably know enough to understand that I would rather see this place a heap of smouldering ruin than the property of Count Rexelaer." He turned upon the Notary: "You had no right," he said, "to take both my pay and Count Rexelaer's."

Nicholas Strum returned his patron's look, full in the face. Then he rose as majestically as his ungovernable limbs would allow. "It is your Nobleness's good pleasure as it is your prerogative," he said, "to insult your inferiors. But such insults, as my father used to say, hit back, like guns. I acted for the best." And he left the room.

The Baroness drew near to her husband. "If there is not money enough, we must live still more simply," she said, taking the woman's view. But her heart sank as she thought of her housekeeping-book.

The Baron lifted his face from his hands: "Perhaps I was hard on Strum," he said. "He cannot look at these matters from our point of view."

"But why does that man want to become sole mortgagee?"

"It is next best. At the first hitch he would sell, and—purchase."

"I do not understand exactly," she said. "Do you, dearest?"

"No, I do not understand exactly," he murmured humbly.

"But God will leave us Deynum," she said, and, as her cheek touched his, she burst into tears.

Nicholas Strum went tramping downstairs in a towering rage. He was very much wronged, and he had cause to be angry.

"Serve them right," he said, as he struck his umbrella viciously at the oaken banisters. "'Tis like this that the great folk make themselves hated, with their beggarly, haughty, ignorant ways! 'Tis a sin against God and them to come lowering their greatness, even when just debts have got to be paid. And my father was right, as that White Creature put it: 'Gentlemen should do business with each other and for themselves.' I wonder how they'd manage. For each of them expects to give all the kicks and to get all the half-pence."

Thus righteously grumbling, he went in search of Count Rexelaer, whom he had left in the park.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

## YOUNG REINOUT MEETS HIS UNKNOWN FRIEND AGAIN.

UPON receiving, through his own Notary, the Baron's curt and absolute refusal to enter into negotiations, Count Hilarius immediately started for Deynum. Matters were coming to a crisis. He had succeeded, after months of waiting and intriguing, in getting himself nominated on the Board of Directors of the Bank which held by far the greater part of the Baron's enormous mortgages. Once there, he had prevented a renewal. And now the supreme moment had arrived. The place must either fall into his hands, almost immediately, or the Baron must dispose of it to others and probably lose it to the family for ever.

The Count took Reinout with him, Monsieur de Souza being laid up with one of his bad attacks of gout on the chest. And nothing delighted Reinout so much as a glimpse of the country. He was another creature there, away from the straight pavements of his daily life, rushing to and fro in reckless, aimless animal motion, bewildered and intoxicated by the sounds, the smells, the great sky overhead.

Father and son stood in a clearing in the woods, from whence they could get a vague view of the house. They had halted there, at a safe distance, leaving

Strum to proceed on his errand. To Reinout the brisk autumnal walk had been a source of overwhelming amusement and interest. The Count, also, enjoyed this first sight of a place which had been the Mecca of his thoughts ever since he could think at all. It caused him an immense satisfaction to return the salutes of the rare peasants they came across. He felt a sort of proprietorship in them.

"Look, Reinout, there it is!" he cried. "The home of your ancestors!" He drew his son towards him, and they stood gazing side by side. The Count was deeply moved.

An indefinable thrill of pride and disappointment ran down Reinout's back. It was very grand, but, after all, it was earthly. He had dreamed, through long years, a dream of the intangible. And the October air lay chill and brown over all that dreary stretch of trees—and the shadowy distant building with its feeble film of ascending smoke.

"It isn't a bit like Brazil," he said.

The Count could not suppress a movement of impatience. Why did the child at every emergency, always say or do the stupidest thing? "Run away, and play," he said. And Reinout eagerly availed himself of the permission. He wandered off into the wood, attracted by one delight after another, and ultimately lost his way and came out into a country-lane where he met a carter who drove him back to the village.

The village he found almost as curious as the woodlands surrounding it. He inspected the Protestant Church, and took off his cap to Father Bulbius, who came out of the Parsonage to have a look at him. And

a little troop of boys having collected on the green, he distributed his pennies among them. Just as he had disposed of the last, the baker's lame child, Tony, came limping up to find out what was going on. Reinout saw, and despairingly felt in his empty pockets. Then he said aloud: "Oh, I *can't*. Mamma won't mind," and unfastened a small gold stud which held his collar and slipped it into Tony's hand. After that he took refuge in the public-house, where his father had told him they would have some bread and meat before leaving, and asked Hendrika for a bit of string.

The Marquis had grumbled for forty-eight hours. He had not slept. He had only dozed, grumbling. He had eaten nothing, but he had drunk a few cups of bouillon which Antoine had concocted. He had grumbled over them.

The blow which had struck him down seemed to have paralysed all other life within him and to have concentrated his powers into one persistency of grumbling. It was an outlet for his rage against God and himself, a safety-valve of his despair. He lay back among his pillows grumbling. The sun was climbing the white sky. The sick man felt weak.

"I must get up," he burst out, infuriated by this feeling. "I never could stand lying down. You remember, Antoine, how weak I became after that fall with my horse."

Antoine said he remembered.

"True," said the old man eagerly. "Bed does not agree with me. I will get up." Antoine brought his dressing-things, the new ones. The Marquis had



been eager for them to arrive, and had not looked at them when they came.

He now allowed himself to be dressed, with many outbursts of irritation and peevish complaints. And in the intervals of abuse he talked of the accident which had occurred a couple of years ago. "It was Belle-maman," he said. "You remember Belle-maman, Antoine? She was not a bad mare, and I never knew her to stumble before. She took fright at a rascally undertaker whose black bands fluttered in her face. Here, don't crumple my shirt, you. You don't even know how to fit in a stud."

"We all of us take fright at the sight of something ugly, Monsieur le Marquis," said the valet politely. He was having a bad time of it, and felt vindictive. The Marquis talked no more about his accident. He swore till his toilet was completed, and then he stood gazing for a moment by the window. His attention was attracted by the little group of village-children and the central figure, with its graceful bearing, distributing largesse, like a lord.

"It is the same boy," said the Marquis instantly. "Then the family is the same, after all. What did the old man mean?" He turned round to his valet. "Help me downstairs," he said.

"But yes, Monsieur le Marquis," replied Antoine with alacrity. By the time the pair had stumbled down, Reinout had entered the inn-parlour, and they found him confabulating with the landlady. He looked up as the door opened, and his eyes remained riveted on the sick man's face.

"You remember me?" said the Marquis abruptly, as he sank on to the settle.

This question put an end to the boy's doubts. "I do now," he answered honestly. "You are the gentleman who gave me the watch."

"And you are René de Rexelaer. I also, you perceive, have not forgotten. You live here?"

"No, Monsieur, I never was here before. I live at the Hague."

"And this Baron, up at the Castle, he is your uncle?"

"No, Monsieur, we are of the same family, but two separate branches. We do not know each other."

Reinout stood up and answered like a man, though a little embarrassed by the string in his collar. Hendrika had fled.

"Why not?"

"I do not know, Monsieur, unless it be because we are Protestants. Rovert van Rexelaer became a Protestant in 1673."

The Marquis smiled. Ah, that was the reason then. He could quite understand it. These country bumpkins are alike, he thought.

"You have a mother?" he asked after a moment. "Yes? Describe her to me. What is her name?"

"Mamma is very beautiful, and dark," said Reinout, a little wonderingly. "Her name is Margherita de Cachenard. She and I, we come from Brazil."

"Very well," said the Marquis. "After all, I am asking what is no business of mine. Now, listen to me, my child. You are going back to the Hague in an hour or two?"

"Yes, Monsieur, as soon as my father comes."

"Then you will never see me again. You remember the adage I taught you, half a dozen years ago?"

Reinout nodded, half a nod and half a little bow.

"A gentilhomme devoir fait loi," he said.

"That was it. I had forgotten, myself. Live up to it. Make it a truth. I have not." A silence fell on the gloomy inn-parlour. "I have not. Eh? What do you say to that?"

"I am sorry," said Reinout simply.

"So am I." The old man's voice sounded true. He staggered up and motioned to his impassive servant. "Adieu," he said, holding out his hand. The boy touched the wasted fingers, and in the solemn stillness the old man went away.

When Count Hilarius reached the inn half an hour later he was in a very bad temper. Everything went against him, he said, and all on account of a pig-headed old fool that desired his own ruin. He was angry with Reinout for looking untidy, and annoyed at the discovery of Monsieur Farjolle. He hesitated about sending up his card to that gentleman. It would be absurd to return the watch after all this time. But Antoine came down and said his master was very ill and saw no one. He was a French wine-merchant; they were going on to Paris to-morrow. So the Rexelaers went away.

That evening the Baron sent off two letters. One was addressed to his Amsterdam brokers and contained a final order which was to bring him immense, and almost certain success. The other went by hand to the village. Its contents were as follows:

The Baron van Rexelaer van Deynum presents his compliments to Mr. Nicholas Strum, and begs to apologise for any expression he may have made use of this morning which could give Mr. Strum just cause for offence.

Castle Deynum, Thursday evening.

"I don't care," said Mynheer Strum, ungraciously throwing down the piece of paper. That morning he had had to bear Count Rexelaer's silken ill-temper as well. "The fellow's afraid, that's all. I hate these aristocrats. There's nothing drives you wild like constant, compulsory cringing. I'm sick of the lot."

His old mother glanced timidly across the tea-table. She knew her lord and master was in a bad temper, but then, also, she was of an inquiring nature. "A letter from Mynheer the Baron," she said. "Are you commanded up to the Castle again to-morrow, Nicky?"

"No," he answered roughly, "it isn't any business of yours, mother. I wish you'd hold your tongue, always jab, jab, jabbering about the Castle."

"But I feel what a privilege it is for you, Nicky, to have all the great Baron van Rexelaer's business to do just as your father had."

"Hang the great Baron van Rexelaer!" cried Nicholas. "I wish I could send him about his business. I'm a socialist, I am, mother. There, hand me the newspaper. When the smash comes, there'll be no more Barons van Rexelaer."

"And no more notaries," said his mother quietly. She would not have been such a stupid woman, had she been a little less fond of her son.

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# CHAPTER XV.

## "WHY NOT, M. LE MARQUIS?"

THE next couple of days were spent by the Marquis in a semi-lethargic condition, the result of the nervous torture he had undergone. At the twilight-hour on the second day he roused himself and announced his intention of going out for a walk.

"But at this moment," remonstrated Antoine. "And in this country, with the falling damps!"

"Am I to go out when you choose?" asked the invalid. "It rained all yesterday. I am sickening in this musty room. A walk will do me good."

The valet shrugged his shoulders. Why, after all, should he waste his breath?

"And I am anxious to find out," continued the Marquis, while allowing himself to be as carefully arrayed as if he were going to a garden-party at Laeken, "whether it is absolutely certain, as this Baron wrote me, that there is nothing to be got in the village. I cannot stay any longer in this miserable inn."

They had now been at Deynum nearly four days, and Antoine was fast losing all hope of getting his master away. "Indeed, Monsieur le Marquis has delayed here too long already. The smells alone must

be injurious to health. If Monsieur le Marquis would but venture just a little journey farther——”

“Yes, I know,” replied the Marquis. “You want girls to flirt with. I tell you again, nothing brings on these terrible spasms but railway-travelling. I have had them three times, and each time immediately after, or during, a railway-journey. I am dying, but I shall die in my own way, and I shall take my own time about it. You would like to have it over in six months. I am going to take a couple of years to do it in.”

He said this but he did not think it. He would have acted quite differently otherwise. His whole strangeness of behaviour found its root in the fallacious conviction that disease had numbered, not his months, but his days.

“I shall die at Deynum, if I choose,” he said. He stumbled along, leaning heavily forward. And constantly he would pause and pretend to be hunting for his pocket-handkerchief. “I have caught cold in those infamous draughts,” he said. And he lifted the handkerchief to his face and gasped for breath behind it.

“The chillness of the evening air——” began Antoine.

“Silence. Ah, here is the park. It is really very good. But it is not as good as—home, eh?”

Before the servant could answer, the master broke into a violent oath. His own word had stabbed him like a knife.

He shuffled on under the trees. And every now and then he righted himself and strove to walk straight,

and then fell forward again on his servant's arm, and shuffled on.

Presently they were confronted by a view of the house. It lay asleep in the solemn water, dark and still. "Good," said the Marquis again. "Simple, but good," and shuffled on.

It was not till they had turned into the Long Walk, which leads to the village, that they came upon the figure of a man stretched prostrate across the path.

Antoine sprang forward with a cry of surprise. The Marquis, thus suddenly deprived of his prop, staggered back in the impotent effort to stand alone.

"It is Monsieur le Baron!" cried Antoine, lifting the insensible body.

"And what am I to do with Monsieur le Baron?" replied the Marquis querulously. "It is hardly presumable that he is drunk. He has probably had an attack. A sick man cannot carry a dead one."

They looked round helplessly. "Shout!" said the Marquis. "We are not far from the house."

Antoine obeyed and sang out lustily. The Marquis pointed to a white mass lying beneath a tree close by. An open letter, a couple of newspapers,—the evening post.

"Shout again," said the Marquis.

A child came running up. "What is wrong?" she asked fearlessly. "Tiens, des enfants maintenant!" mumbled the Marquis. "Ma petite, this gentleman has fallen, but he is not much hurt."

"It is Papa," cried Wendela. "Oh poor Papa!" She was struggling with her tears, to the Marquis's alarm. "We must carry him to the house," she said,



having mastered them. "You, Monsieur, will you help?"

"Mademoiselle, I regret sincerely, but I cannot," replied the Marquis, deeply humiliated. "Surely someone will come."

She flung him a look of incredulous contempt. "I can do it," she said, and vainly tried to lift the heavy foot. "Halloo!" cried Antoine again.

"Halloo," replied a bright voice. A milk-maid was coming along a side-path.

"Ah, Lise, is it you?" exclaimed the little Freule. "You must help carry Papa. He is ill. This gentleman is not—strong enough."

But, recalled perhaps by the shouting, the Baron now stirred and muttered and opened his eyes.

"I am quite well," he stammered. "I stumbled, that is all. Where are my papers? Where are my papers?" he repeated excitedly.

Antoine gathered them together and put them in his hand. The Baron rose to his feet, with the valet's assistance. "Ah pardon!" he said, "Monsieur—Farjolle." The Marquis was leaning against a tree in profound disgust. What a disgraceful thing was bodily weakness! The shadows were spreading wide and heavy. It was cold.

They formed into a little procession, the Baron leaning on Antoine Lorigont's arm, the Marquis pretending not to press on Wendela's shoulder. The old gentleman broke the silence once. "My little one," he said, "some day you will understand the suffering of not being able." Wendela coloured in the dark, and set her teeth hard to bear the weight of his arm. Lise,

with her clinking pails, brought up the rear, her cheerful step in continuous contrast with the slouch of the others.

"I keep in touch with your shoulder," said the Marquis presently to his companion, "because I am afraid of a false step on this unknown road. I hope I do not hinder you in any way?" "No," she gasped. But she did not ask why he still clung to her all the tighter after they had emerged into the open, near the house. By that time the Baron had almost entirely recovered from his shock. "You will come in, Monsieur, and rest?" he said, turning round. "Gladly," replied the Marquis, whereby he meant that he was too utterly exhausted to decline.

Once in the house, he found himself compelled to remain. The two horses had been out for a long drive in the afternoon, but one of them must take him home after dinner. That meal would be served in half an hour. "I am all right again," said the Baron, "I really am all right." And he introduced Monsieur Farjolle to the Baroness.

That lady was charmed. A gloom hung over the household since the interview with the Notary. The stranger's presence would cause a diversion. A man of the world, a gentleman, and a Catholic!—not that you noticed anything of the religion; still it was a comfort to know it there. And the Marquis, who had locked himself up in his despair since first it closed around him, was astonished to discover that he could still laugh and talk—though with weary heart and body—in the courteous nothings of social intercourse.

Father Bulbius came in to dinner—not an unusual

occurrence—and his bright face clouded over with importance at sight of the other guest. After having kissed the hand of the lady of the house, at imminent peril of apoplexy, he wandered away to the Baron, who was sitting wearily in the shade.

“Do not let me disturb your Nobleness,” said the Father, slowly letting himself down on the low divan. He dropped his voice: “Have you any idea who that gentleman is who calls himself Monsieur Farjolle?”

“Yes,” replied the Baron quickly. “He is a foreigner. He calls himself Monsieur Farjolle. That is enough.”

“Ah, but his servant this morning let fall a title which aroused my curiosity. I questioned him, and I discovered——”

The Baron stopped him. “Hush,” he said.

“But, my dear sir, of course I heard nothing in my official capacity,” cried the Father, bridling. “Surely you know me better than to imagine that the secrets of the confessional——”

“I know, I know, your Reverence. Come, let us talk of something else.” The Baron slowly shut and reopened his eyes, that sure sign of exhaustion, whether of body or brain.

The Marquis, meanwhile, was praising the house to his hostess. He drawled out his words with an unconcerned ease of expression which seemed conscious that men would find leisure to listen as long as his Grandeur found inclination to speak.

“I have lived here; I shall die here,” said the Baroness, bravely. “It is that, I suppose, which endears the place to me unspeakably. But, to you, Deynum must be terribly dull.” She cast a commiserating

glance at the old man's hollow face. She could feel for all the various moods of refinement. The stranger must be morbidly afraid of the society of his equals to put up with the accommodation of the village-inn.

"Oh no, I like the country," said the Marquis. He was greatly bored. He looked down at his smart patent-leather boots; there was a splash of mud across one of them, and it persistently drew his attention. With one carefully-kept hand he smoothed his white moustache and curled over his ears the locks which were neatly drawn forward from the parting at the back of his head. He was not dressed for dining. The fact did not discomfit him; nothing could have done that. But he felt annoyed by it.

"I," said the child, who had drawn near to them, "I too should like to die at Deynum."

The Marquis winced. "You, Mademoiselle," he said lightly, holding out his hand to her. "A pretty child like you ought not to talk of death."

She did not take the hand. "Death!" she replied gravely. "That is purgatory; it is horrid. I meant 'dying.' I should like to die at Deynum and go and sleep with the others in the chapel. Afterwards—it is horrid, but one does not know!"

"But you are a little philosopher," said the Marquis with a ghastly grin.

"The child does not understand what she is talking about," interposed Mevrouw van Rexelaer, rising. "Permit me to take your arm, Monsieur."

At table the little life left in the sick man seemed to flare up under congenial surroundings. He ate sparingly, but he drank a glass or two of his host's wine

and warmly commended it. And he told a couple of amusing stories, cautiously, as if afraid of compromising himself. Father Bulbius sat admiring him open-mouthed.

Stimulated by the Marquis's example and especially flattered by the praise his cellar was receiving from so manifest a connoisseur, the master of the house also somewhat shook off the lethargy of his own sorrows and even so far conquered himself as to tell the story of the King's Wine. How in the glorious year '15, the great year of deliverance, he, being then about twelve years old, had lived with his mother for a time at a small country-house in Brabant near the frontier, while his father was with the army in Belgium. And how on one beautiful calm June evening news had flown up from the village that a courier was come with the tidings of a great victory to bear to the King. His horse had broken down; he was clamouring for another—would the Baroness give her best? And how he—little Reinout, as he was then—had run away to the stables and saddled his father's Bruno, with only a cry to the groom that he would be back again to-morrow, and had ridden out upon the high-road he scarcely knew how or why. And then how he had rushed onward all through the soft summer-night, with but one thought in his heart of the great victory and the joy of the King! and had crossed the mighty waters of the Moerdyk and the Maas, while some took his gold sleeve-links and buttons in payment and others helped him on with God speed! for the glad news that he bore. How a post-keeper had lent him a horse when Bruno could bear even his light weight no further, and how, at last,

in the glory of the proud June morning, he had drawn rein, fainting but triumphant, at the Palace-gates. How he had cried for his grandfather, who was one of the Court-chamberlains, and how, between tears and laughter, he had finally poured out his story at the Sovereign's feet, half an hour before the State-courier came in with the Despatches. How the King, when the truth was confirmed, had patted his head, saying: "What must I do for you, my fine little fellow?" and how he had answered with his eyes on the table: "A glass of wine, please, your Majesty and Grandpapa, though it isn't my birthday——" and how the room had swum round, as all the courtiers laughed. How the King had declared that he should never want *that* to drink the royal health in and had sent his father a hogshead to lay aside for him, with the intimation that, when next he did his country good service, he must ask for some more. "I reminded him of his promise on a later occasion," said the Baron in conclusion, "and I got another, and larger, present of the same. It is good wine, as you say. I used to keep it, but now I drink it. In a few years there will be nobody left to do so."

"There's me, Papa," said the child.

"Women don't drink wine," replied her father. "They sip it, without tasting."

The Baroness had heard the story several hundred times before, but she had never heard it told to a Frenchman. She was the more surprised that her husband avoided specifying the "other occasion," which was merely the siege of Antwerp in the Belgian war.

"He is too modest to allude to his own military exploits," she thought.

"The King is dead," said the Baron, saluting as he emptied his glass, "Long live the King!"

Gustave, by the side-board, saluted too.

"I have not yet had an opportunity of telling you," said the Baron, when the two gentlemen were alone together, waiting for the carriage, "how much I regretted the failure of my attempt to find you a suitable lodging. I fear now that you will very soon be leaving us."

He felt how complimentary was the "us."

"You are too kind, my dear Baron," murmured the visitor, without regarding his own words. The old man sat staring vaguely before him; he was dead-tired, miserably oppressed by the weight which no companionship could cast-off. He spoke a few sentences about the weather and the crops, and the other answered him.

"I am ill," said the Marquis suddenly. "I am dying. I can't travel any more. I won't travel. I can't stay in that filthy inn. Monsieur de Rexelaer, can you really not find me some place I could buy to die quietly in?" A hungry, hunted look came over his face; he was yearning to speak of his trouble to someone besides Antoine.

The Baron got up and walked across the room, away from his guest. "I know of one house," he said, "if you were willing to pay for it."

"I will pay anything," cried the other passionately,

"I want rest. This stupid anxiety is killing me before my time. What is the house that you speak of?"

"It is this," said the Baron with his back turned. He clutched at a chair and sat down.

There was an awkward pause. Then the Marquis said stiffly, "You misapprehend me, Monsieur. I was very much in earnest. I am perfectly well aware that you cannot place this house at my disposal."

"Why not, Monsieur le Marquis?" said the other from his dark corner.

"What! You know me! That scoundrel has blabbed!"

"Forgive me. The fault is not your valet's. From the first moment I heard your name, I was aware that I had the honour of speaking to the Marquis de la Jolais."

"Ah!" cried the Marquis.

"There are not so many of us that we do not know about each other, at least in Holland and Belgium. Forgive my indiscretion, which I deeply regret. I was speaking under the influence of excitement. But I warn you, I fear that your name is known to others than myself."

The Marquis bowed, exaggeratedly vexed. He had clung to his sick man's whim. "But this—this—how shall I say?—about your castle?" he asked. "It is a pleasantry?"

"Monsieur, is it a subject I could joke upon, even did I desire to insult you? If you wish to buy the place—the whole thing—you can do so. The air does not agree with my wife. You see how pale she looks. I am anxious to settle abroad."



"But I want a house, not an estate," said the Marquis. He rose as Antoine came forward with his wraps, and, motioning him back, tottered across to the dark spot in which the other was sitting. "I thank you, sir," he said, "for the signal honour you have done me. Believe me, I know how to appreciate it." They shook hands in silence, and then the Marquis was driven back to the inn.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### "J'OSAIS."

"ENCORE un de flambé," said the Marquis to himself. His class-feeling was honestly sorry for the Baron; none the less he could not entirely suppress a faint glow of satisfaction that another of the world's mighty ones should have come to grief, like himself. "Sold up!" he said, and smiled bitterly.

He could easily put two and two together and conclude that the Baron had speculated and lost. "If he has played away such a family estate, what a fool he must be!" thought Monsieur de la Jolais. In so far he partly wronged Baron Rexelaer, for that gentleman, unable to pay off the mortgages his ancestors had accumulated, had only taken to speculation as an ultimate possibility of escape. By his operations he had lost more than twice the original deficit. The news of the final crash had reached him through the last post. His brokers, refusing to hold out any longer, had sold.

There was no écarté that evening. Only the Baroness's Patience, with Father Bulbius watching it.

"Here, you, Antoine, listen," said the Marquis imperiously. He had had his evening injection of morphia, and the valet was about to withdraw. "I have something to say to you. My identity is out."

The valet's conscience smote him; on that account he smiled superciliously. "But what could Monsieur le Marquis expect?" he said. "And with an alias which is Monsieur le Marquis' own name?"

"Peace," interrupted his master. "You told. Whom?"

Antoine protested with vehemence. The Marquis listened carelessly, half-hidden by the faded green bed-curtains. Presently he said: "Let us understand each other. This person, will he tell others?"

"But nobody knows!" cried Antoine.

"I suppose that means he will not. You will go to him to-night—to-night, do you hear!—and offer him money to hold his tongue. If it is the priest, as I presume, so much the better. He will keep his promise as well as the money. Or, still cheaper, you might pass your words through the confessional?"

Loripont's countenance expressed his disapproval of such levity. He thought his master little better than a heathen.

"Your religion comes useful occasionally," the Marquis went on. "Where's that little Virgin of yours? Find it."

Loripont obeyed with a scowl. He drew from under his shirt a tiny silver image, fastened to a string, and

kissed it reverently, and then stood dangling it, irreverently. Once before, upon their first coming together, his master had made him swear by it, swear never to steal or cheat. He had religiously kept his oath. The little image was his guardian-angel and every-day god. It was no good for the other world, but it looked after him in this. Fortunately the Marquis had not exacted a promise of absolute veracity. The wisdom of government lies in the regulation of liberty.

"I will give you," said Monsieur de la Jolais, toying with the trifles on his bed-table, "one thousand francs for every week I have to live. That is my offer. My demand is this:

"First. You will send for your wife, and you and she will tend me with un murmuring devotion. Secondly. You will both preserve absolute silence about me and my doings, now and ever afterwards. There is no mystery. I do not intend to do anything extraordinary, but I will not have my sufferings known to the world. As soon as I am dead, you will convey my body back to Saint-Leu, and you will give out that I died of some chest-complaint—Pneumonia. That is all. Swear. I can trust you to frighten your wife into her part. Swear for both."

"I will swear, Monsieur le Marquis, on one condition——"

"You have heard the condition," said the Marquis, sitting up in bed. "The money shall be paid you. Swear."

He cowed the man with his keen eyes. Antoine mumbled "I swear," as he lifted the little image to his lips.

But immediately afterwards his manner changed. He leant back against the roughly-painted door, slipped the little doll out of sight behind his collar, and folded his arms.

"Take a chair!" said the Marquis, with courteous scorn. But the valet did not modify his pose. "I also have my conditions, Monsieur le Marquis," he said. "Will Monsieur le Marquis have the goodness to listen to them for a moment?"

Monsieur de la Jolais sank back and plaintively wondered where was the strength of those good old days when he would have cursed the fellow out of the room. His head was growing dizzy. He merely said: "You should not first have taken your oath."

"I permit myself to differ from Monsieur le Marquis," retorted the valet. "I remembered that I was dealing with a gentilhomme."

The Marquis felt the force of the rebuke. "What is it you want?" he said. "Be brief. I stand in great need of rest."

"Monsieur le Marquis de la Jolais-Farjolle," began Antoine, striving in vain to keep his voice quite steady, "when I entered your service eight years ago, you bound me down never to appropriate any of those little advantages which a gentleman's service naturally brings with it. You paid me the usual wages. I therefore earned less than half of what is usual. I have kept faithfully to my promise; I have never appropriated a halfpenny. I believe that, on the whole, I have not given serious cause for dissatisfaction?"

"So be it," said the Marquis. "You could have left, if you wished."

"Not only did I not earn my due," continued the valet, "but I was obliged to spend part of my wages, on your behalf, to keep up the honour of our name. Permit me to say it, Monsieur le Marquis, but a man in my position who respects himself and his connections cannot expose himself to the charge of continuous underpayment of inferiors. Wherever, during all these years, you have instructed me—at home or abroad—to give a cabman or a porter a franc, I have been compelled by circumstances, Monsieur le Marquis,—excuse my mentioning it—to make the sum one franc fifty, and sometimes two."

"The more fool you," said the Marquis.

"So I have always thought, Monsieur le Marquis. But one attaches oneself, against one's will, to the great name one is connected with. Permit me to add, Monsieur le Marquis, that I have carefully kept account of all the sums I was thus compelled to advance in a little note-book, which I have here." He touched his breast.

"Anything more?" asked the Marquis.

"There is just one point which I am afraid I must still mention,"—he hesitated—"Taking into account the great risk of these advances, I have considered myself entitled to reckon ten per cent. interest on each payment from the day on which it was made. I can assure Monsieur le Marquis on the solemn oath by which I bound myself that the accounts I have handed in have always been rigidly accurate, and that in the extra charges I now bring forward I have never exceeded the limits of what I considered the unavoidable."

"*You* considered," said the Marquis.

"Monsieur will allow me to point out that Monsieur le Marquis de la Jolais-Farjolle has the reputation of being the most extravagant nobleman in Brussels. He has not the reputation of being the most generous. He would probably be known as the stingiest, were it not for his humble servant, Antoine Loripont."

He stared his master straight in the face, but not impertinently. Then he produced his little account-book and held it out. "The sum total," he said, "is three thousand seven hundred and forty-three francs, nineteen centimes. The centimes sound unreal; they are the outcome of the interest-reckoning. I vouch for strictly honest accuracy, by the Mother of God——" and he pulled out his little image, and kissed it.

"Go to the devil," said the Marquis.

"As Monsieur le Marquis pleases. But I mentioned this subject because I wished to forewarn Monsieur le Marquis that I shall consider myself entitled to refund myself this money—which I have always looked upon as a loan—from whatever moneys or articles of value I may happen to have in my keeping at the time of Monsieur le Marquis's possible demise—I have understood that much from the beginning."

"You shall make an inventory for me," said the Marquis. "I shall send it to the Notary's."

Their eyes met. "I was mistaken," said the valet coolly. "I should have delayed my oath after all."

The Marquis turned his face to the wall. "Take the money," he said. "Take it now. But, for Heaven's sake, let me sleep!"

The repose which he longed for did not, however, visit him as soon as he had expected. He, who had always been an excellent sleeper—it was natural to his tranquil good health—had yet to learn that there is an exhaustion which does not precede, but precludes, recuperative rest. Sleep, like the jilt she is, does not come when courted. She attracts, and casts her glamour all around her, and then laughs and runs away.

And she leaves behind her all the torment of that living night-watch which is so unlike the life of day.

All the hideous moonlight of a soul distorted, in which depths of unknown stillness wake and move beneath the shifting shadows, to a rush of restlessness that dies away and yet is never altogether gone, while the thousand shapeless spectres that rise and breathe and have no being come roaming to and fro in the chilly greyne—into unending distance, with a weary drawing of the brain, and then back again upon the burning eye-balls, with a blow as of a hammer, and once more down avenues of vagueness, never fully visible—far—far—never out of sight.

The Marquis sat up in bed. "Rest," he said aloud. And then he fell back again, and tossed from side to side.

And as he did so, there woke within him an indefinite consciousness of something—something wrong—at that point where the dead weight lay under his breast. For the moment only there was the vague expectancy—half curious, half anxious—and then steadily, like the pressure of a borer, slowly piercing farther, there came deepening on his soul a persistency of pain. Then, the expectancy that it would pass over, that it was relent-

ing, lessening—a sharp twinge, almost welcome, in the momentary diversion—sudden hope!—and then again, slowly, steadily, the piercing, pressing pain.

He revolted against it in the fury of his impotence, tired no longer, no longer conscious of fatigue. He struck his hands wildly into the darkness, and threw back the bed-clothes, and pulled them up again. He lighted a candle, and stared at his haggard face in the glass, and fiercely dashed out the light. And at last, when he had pressed his fists against his pursed-up lips and told himself again and again: "I will not," he broke into a shriek of agony and thrust his head down into the pillows and tried to believe he had not heard his own voice.

It had rung out, nevertheless. Presently there came a knocking at the door. The landlady, aroused by the cry, had risen hastily to inquire if she could be of use. Should she call Mynheer's servant who slept on the other side of the house? Mynheer was taken bad again; did he want the doctor sent for? Her man could easily go if it was desired! With the simple logic of her sort, the landlady was all the more voluble because the Marquis did not understand her. But even in his necessity the latter resented the sympathetic tone of her voice, as it came pouring through the keyhole. He refused to be pitied by these creatures. He called for his servant, and cursed him when he came, and, at length, by the help of fresh morphia, was lulled into some kind of repose.

And thus we can comprehend one of the reasons why Monsieur de la Jolais, when shipwrecked at



Deynum, had elected to remain there. Be it known, then, that Antoine, when he described his master as the most extravagant noble in Brussels, had but given one half of the characterisation as it was repeated in the salons and clubs of that city. It was true that the Marquis, wherever his own pleasures and comforts were concerned, indulged in that careless extravagance which is so often found in stingy men of wealth. He was notorious for having ordered an extra train to Paris upon missing the regular one, and then having quarrelled over his fare with the cabman who drove him from the station. It was he who had—ah, but that is a nasty story. The man is dead. Better let it alone.

He had another reputation, however, of which he was far vainer, the only thing, perhaps, of which he was really vain—the reputation of having been, all his life, the bravest of a reckless set. From his youth upwards he had enjoyed the excitement of foolhardy feats, risking his life a hundred times, uselessly, for the laughter and the triumph of the thing. He had rejoiced to think that none of his comrades cared to take a particular ditch and hedge on his own estate; he liked to show them how to do it, as he said. It was he who had driven a horse in a chaise from the high box of a phaeton and pair behind it, holding the reins of all three, up the Montagne de la Cour, and round by the Royal Park. It was he also who had lain down between the rails—for a wager—and let a train pass over him, but that was very long ago. Moreover, he had fought at least a dozen duels in his day, and, on one occasion, when his adversary's bullet carried off

the point of one of his moustaches, he had turned coolly to that gentleman with the punning words: "Vous me rasez, Monsieur." He had been a hero among his companions for the devil-may-care contempt of death which had never found a worthy occasion of displaying itself, and it was to this well-known trait that he owed his nickname of "J'ose" an abbreviation for Josephe. He had been intensely gratified by this public recognition of his valour. It was the one "greatness" which he had achieved for himself. Wealth, influence, position, he had been born to these; he was calmly proud of them, but when he forced his frightened horse along the parapet of the terrace of his family-seat of Saint-Leu, he felt that he was achieving a distinction which no ancestors could have power to bestow. He was vain of it therefore, in bright contrast to that entirely different feeling of hereditary pride which, in reality, is but a cumbrous thing to bear, at its best.

And this man who had so often tempted death as a possibility now recoiled from it in horror when it came to him, a certainty, under the form of disease. Somehow or other, it was all quite different. The light fell otherwise. Before, there had always been the energy of escape, straining every nerve into momentarily increasing sureness of victory; now there was nothing except the consciousness of powerless failure. It was no longer the old leap over a fence, but a slow, remorseless fall against a wall of adamant.

And, above all, there had been this terrible actuality of pain—death through suffering; it was a new thought. Dangerless, inactive, stupid suffering, it was

upon him already. He recoiled from it. Worse than that, he trembled at it. And in his own horror of the tremble, the dread, the cowardice, he fled he knew not whither, if only from those who would mark, and jest at, his fall. J'ose. He would die as he had lived. But he did not "dare." Some wag would alter his sobriquet into "José." None must know of this illness. He tried to get away into Germany; any little watering-place would do. And then, when he lay stranded at Deynum, it seemed to him that Deynum might be the very place he stood in need of. He could not venture to travel again, least of all in his own country. The shriek of this night decided him. None but Lorigont or his wife must ever hear him shriek again. He could have killed the poor landlady for her looks of compassion, and the all-comprehensive waggle of her good-natured head.

"You will go," said the Marquis to Antoine in the early morning, "and fetch me the Baron van Rexelaer. My compliments, you understand, and all that sort of thing."

Antoine departed, and on his way he met Father Bulbius. The good Father was pottering about in the village, *his* village—more his than anybody else's, for, whoever owned the bodies, the souls were the priest's. He was enjoying the breezy freshness of that early hour, and he stopped before a little flaxen-haired mud-pie makester, and patted her on the head and said she was good. But he felt that he could not honestly have treated himself in the same manner. He was selfish. For when strangers ask us for our houses and chattels, we, if we be good Christians, should grant

their request. Especially when the rent they offer is high.

Between fear of his conscience and dread of his housekeeper the Father had a bad time of it. He espied Antoine and went towards him, hoping by his aid to reconcile them both.

"Good morning, Monsieur Antoine," he said, nodding his benevolent countenance to and fro. "And how is the patient this fine morning? Better, I hope, and able to continue his journey?"

"No, your Reverence, he is not better," replied Antoine. "Seems to me he is near his journey's end."

"Dear me!" cried the priest, nonplussed. "I hope he is prepared to depart!" To himself he said: "Anyhow, you see, it would not be worth while."

"By no means," replied Antoine decidedly. "I endeavour to do my duty, but it is very trying for a servant, your Reverence."

"Fortunately you have all the conveniences of an inn. It is very convenient, is an inn, Monsieur Antoine. Much more so than a house of one's own. If you want a thing, you simply ring for it."

"And simply do not get it," said Antoine.

"You are not—comfortable? I hope you are."

"Oh no——" began Loripont. Then he caught a glimpse of the Father's imploring face. "Not uncomfortable," he added, and smiled to think how good he was to the priests.

"Well, well, we all have our trials," sighed the Father. "Some of us have not what we want, others have what they would gladly be without. Au revoir, Monsieur Antoine."

"Serviteur, Monsieur le Curé."

But Antoine paused, and then retraced his steps.

"Monsieur le Curé," he cried, "a thousand pardons. There is just one question I would ask you if I dared."

Father Bulbius, who had been meditatively contemplating a still more meditative pig—astray from the right path, like himself—started, in anxious expectation. Should he venture—a second time—to refuse? And what would Veronica say, if he came back to her houseless after all?

"Monsieur le Curé," said Antoine hesitatingly, "a little mass—eh?—just a little one, for my—master; it might do much good, perhaps, but it couldn't—eh, do you think so?—do much harm?"

"Certainly not," replied the priest with an approbatory smile. "The idea is an extremely praiseworthy one. But Monsieur le Marquis is not yet deceased. And besides, would he spend money on masses?"

"It isn't possible, I presume," said Antoine, still feeling his way, "to smooth over some of the unpleasantnesses beforehand? Purgatory is a very awful thought, Monsieur le Curé."

"It is indeed," assented the priest, with true solemnity.

"There is a little sum I have set aside," hazarded Antoine. "It is not as large perhaps as might be considered desirable. But the Marquis has not been a good master to me, and I feel justified in leaving it—insufficient. He shall have five per cent. of the sum he refunded last night," reasoned Antoine. "And

I hope," he added aloud, "that my action in this matter will be accounted to my credit when my own time comes."

"Our most meritorious acts," said the priest sententiously, "are not those, Monsieur Antoine, which impress us most vividly with the certitude of their meritoriousness."

Loripont winced under the rebuke. "Well, your Reverence," he said, "I am a poor man, but I can't bear the idea of even my master drifting away into—that! If you can do anything later on to make matters more comfortable, I should not wish it to be omitted."

"So be it," replied the Father. "May I ask: have you fixed on any sum?"

"Let us begin with a hundred francs," said Loripont loftily, suddenly rising from his reverential air into one of patronising importance. "One hundred francs, Monsieur le Curé." And he took his leave and went on his way to the Baron. "Religion is a very expensive item," he muttered to himself, "and supposing—supposing—it were none of it true in the end!"

You who laugh in your souls at reading of this man's thinkings, has the littleness of your life so dried up the tears within you that you have none left to weep over its majesty struck down in the dust? O God, all-loving, all-wise, all-terrible, this then is Thy service in the latter-day of Thy mercy, and we, Thy faithless, self-deceiving children, holding up our rags to shield us from Thy radiance, we call upon these, in their filthiness, and hail them as God! From the

religions of our inheriting, our imbibing, our creating—from all religions but of Thine implanting—deliver us, O Lord!”

## CHAPTER XVII.

NOT AS WE WILL, BUT AS WE WOULD, O LORD.

A COUPLE of hours later Mynheer van Rexelaer was ushered into the Marquis's presence. The ceremony of oiling, trimming and curling had been completed, and, in so far as the word is suggestive of worship, that ceremony might have been looked upon as a morning-orison to the Devil, who had been plentifully invoked with imprecations and prayers. The valet had smiled regretfully once or twice, as one who sees a child rushing heedlessly into punishment. After a double-weighted oath at his clumsiness in dropping the curling-iron—even valets will get nervous at times—he had ventured on a “*Pourtant, Monsieur le Marquis——*” to be immediately interrupted with: “Just so. *Pour tant. For so much a month do you do me such service!*”

The Baron found the invalid sitting discontentedly among the strange medley of his surroundings, a magnificent cloak of blue fox trailing on the sanded floor, a number of costly objects scattered about over the furniture, a soft luxury of toilet perfumes overpowering the paraffin.

“Do me the favour to take a seat,” said the Marquis.

The Baron sat down.

"I am about to be impolite," continued the invalid. "I am an old man and the circumstances of the case must serve as my excuse. May I venture, to ask, Monsieur de Rexelaer—forgive me—whether you still retain unaltered your intention of travelling abroad?"

The Baron strove hard to steady his eyebrows.

"But yes," he said abruptly.

"And am I then to understand that you still do me the honour of proposing the possibility of my becoming the purchaser of your house in this place, which you no longer require?"

The Baron van Rexelaer got up and began to pace to and fro. He saw a look of fatigue and annoyance go flitting across the sick man's face. He remembered that he had been asked to sit, and so sat down again.

"Yes," he said.

"Then will you permit me to say that I have reconsidered your offer, which took me by surprise yesterday at an unfortunate moment. As I mentioned to you before, I want a quiet place to die in. That is all. You do not wish to let?"

"I could not," said the Baron. "I must sell—sell the whole estate—or nothing."

"So I understood," replied Monsieur de la Jolais. "Personally, of course, I should much have preferred a far smaller purchase. But I cannot help myself, and, when I am dead, it matters nothing what becomes of my money." This was true, yet even "the most extravagantly selfish nobleman in Belgium" would hardly have made up his mind to such vast gratification of his dying whim, had it not been for the thought of



young Reinout, the other Rexelaer, over yonder at the Hague.

"You have no children?" said the Baron. "Still, it seemed to me that there is a young Monsieur de la Jolais in the regiment of the Guides."

"But, you know all about us, Monsieur," rejoined the Marquis with a faint smile. "It is my cousin. He is a young rogue who only this year neglected my Saint's Day for the races. I shall leave him Saint-Leu and its belongings. Nothing more. Saint-Leu is my home."

"I know," said the Baron sadly. "Who does not? One knows of Chatsworth, of Dampierre. Even the vulgar. One knows of Saint-Leu."

The Marquis was gratified, whether dying or not. He nodded approval. "But I am taking up your time," he said. "If you will kindly direct me to the person whom you wish to act for you, provided he understands French, I will send my servant, who is entirely trustworthy, to settle the whole matter without delay."

"Monsieur," replied the Baron hastily, "if you will permit me, let us have no intermediaries. The various mortgages on Deynum amount to four hundred thousand florins. The net produce of the estate is about twelve thousand. We must not ask what thousands the building of the Castle has cost. I am told that, at the present moment, if sold by auction, it would hardly realise three hundred and twenty."

"I offer you three hundred and twenty," said the Marquis, "on certain conditions. One is that you allow

me to take over all the furniture I require, exclusive of heirlooms, at a valuation."

"Take the heirlooms too!" burst out the Baron, losing his hold.

"Exclusive of heirlooms," repeated the Marquis softly. "These, if you wish, I will have properly catalogued and put aside. My second condition is that the secret of my identity be inviolably kept, by yourself, on your word of honour, by any official concerned in the matter, on oath."

The Baron bowed.

"I have a third condition which I hardly like to bring forward. My days are numbered. I am anxious—I should wish——"

"Monsieur," said the Baron. "In forty-eight hours." The other did not protest. In decency he could not.

"I," said the Baron, taking up his hat, "I also have a condition. One only. I should wish to have it inserted in the contract."

"And it is?"

"That you, and your heirs and assigns after you, solemnly bind yourselves never to sell the estate or any part of the estate to a person who calls himself Count Hilarius van Rexelaer, or to any of his descendants, relations or connections."

The Marquis waited some considerable time before he answered. Then he asked wearily; "Say it again, please."

Baron van Rexelaer repeated the clause, slowly. "Sell the estate or part of the estate—that I will promise. Certainly. I have no objection," said M. de la Jolais with half-closed eyes.

"Or let," added the Baron, delighted at his own perspicacity.

"Or let. Undoubtedly. The clause to be binding in perpetuity. Au revoir."

The Baron van Rexelaer stumbled over the doorstep, and crept down the steep stairs. He was not thinking very much of his loss; he realized it no more than a fond woman realizes her husband's sudden death at her side. He was debating how he should raise the money still wanting to complete the mortgage and yet manage to support his wife and child.

It was a very lovely morning in the park, brilliant with deep-golden sunshine, cheerfully warm and yet freshly invigorating—with no sound but the occasional rustle of a falling leaf through the quiet glow of the cool brown landscape.

He must go and tell his wife first of all. He stopped abruptly in the lane. There was a deeper depth, then, even to deepest sorrow.

Mevrouw was out in the grounds, they told him. Gustave, who spent the greater part of his time watching—or, as he called it, "watching over"—"his family," had seen Mevrouw go out with the Freule. The Baron wandered away, down one of the avenues, pondering over the deficit. And his unconscious footsteps led him naturally to the chapel, where he found his wife, alone.

He saw her through the open door, kneeling in the dimness by the chancel. He crept slowly into the building, and came close to her, and knelt by her side.

The Baroness was muttering paternosters. Her husband gently checked her. "Let us pray," he said, "for strength in tribulation, in deepest tribulation." And they prayed.

The little chapel was very silent, darkly shadowed, beneath its marble heroes and pictured saints.

"I sometimes wonder," said the Baron when they had concluded, "whether our petitions really reach His throne."

"Oh hush, hush!" whispered the lady in a low voice of horror. She spoke as one who sees suddenly evoked before her visions of the dead.

"Are you so confident, dearest," said the Baron, in the same hushed accents, "that He would leave us Deynum, were we to ask it of Him?"

"He has left it us hitherto," replied his wife evasively.

"But were He to take it from us—supposing He had already taken it from us—would He, will He, give us strength to bear the loss?"

The White Baroness rose slowly to her feet. "It is impossible," she said. "I will not believe it. Reinout, my husband, why do you speak of these things?"

Reinout van Rexelaer flung himself prone on the altar-steps.

"Oh God," he cried with a sudden loudness that seemed to strike against the solemn hush around. "Oh God that hearest not petitions for this world's prosperity, hear now our cry for strength, to bear the weight of prayers unheard!"

He lay silent, with his hands before his face. And she stood beside him, white, and silent too.

Many minutes had passed, when she stooped forward and laid her hand upon his shoulder. She drew the fingers away from his face, and slowly lifted it upwards. Her own was set hard and strong as if carved in marble.

"Happy they," she said, "who suffer blameless for their fathers' sins. Yours, my darling, was a heritage of ruin, mortgaged acres and a noble name. And the name is nobler now in your unsullied keeping than ever champion held it in the days of yore. And the lands!—God gave them; man has taken. You and I, we have each other. Love is God's to give, not even His to take away!"

She pointed to the blazon over the chancel-window, as he still knelt staring at her with troubled eyes: "*Ipsa glorior infamia*," she said.

He rose to his feet and made as if he would have kissed her. But she put him away.

"Strong," she said. "Strong. We have struggled to retrieve the misdoings of our fathers. We have struggled our life long, and the end has been vain. And we are utterly ashamed. But ours is a glorious shame."

He had neither the courage nor the power at that moment to undeceive her in the midst of what, at best, was but a partial truth.

"Papa! Mamma!" cried the child's bright voice at the chapel door. It dropped as she came up the little

aisle. "I have been looking everywhere for you, Mamma." There was a note of petulance in her words. It seemed to her young restlessness that her mother was perpetually praying.

"Shall we tell her?" asked her father aloud. The mother nodded "Yes." "Child," he continued, turning full towards his daughter. "We are going to leave Deynum. We are going away."

She brought her hands swiftly together, as if to clap them, then checked herself, remembering where she was. "Oh delicious!" she said, with bated ecstasy. "Are we to stay with my uncle de Heerle? Or, Papa, will you take me to the Hague at last?"

"Hush, Wendela, you must not——"

"But you have promised for the last three years."

"You must not misunderstand me, little daughter. We are going, never to return."

Wendela stamped her foot on the marble floor, an old, bad habit of her impetuous nature, which required a lot of breaking. "But no," she said, "I do not understand."

"It is going to be sold," interposed the Baron desperately.

As the words fell upon her, the child's face seemed for a moment to harden and lose all its youthfulness. It grew sharp and thin; it would have been wonderfully like her mother's, but for the flaming eyes.

"Sold," she repeated, as if thinking out the word—then fiercely:

"Papa, this is not *your* wickedness!"

"Wanda?" cried her mother, but her father motioned back all protest. "Wickedness?" he said. "No, we are too poor to keep it, and therefore——"

"Then it is God's!" she burst out, and, leaping up the altar-steps, she suddenly struck down, in fierce passion, one of the great vases filled with white chrysanthemums, sending its beautiful weight in clattering fragments over the floor. And then she fled away, she knew not whither, in a loud tempest of weeping.

Piet Poster found her, half an hour later, curled up near Lady Bertha's Cross, under the trees, a limp bundle of misery.

"What is it, Freule? Are you asleep?" he asked of a lot of tumbled hair on two rounded arms. But no voice would answer. Nor any feature show itself.

Something told him, however, that the silent figure was not asleep, but animate, watchful, listening. He was alarmed, or perhaps a little curious. He gently touched, then shook, an irresponsive arm. Then, although he was only a little peasant-boy, he hit upon a powerful ruse.

"She is ill," he said aloud. "I must go for somebody."

And he ran off a few steps. She started to her feet immediately, hot and ruffled. "Can't you leave me alone?" she cried. "I want to be quiet."

He came back quite close. "I'm so sorry," he said. "You've been crying. What is it?"

"I'm not crying," she answered angrily.

He was too much of a gentleman to amend his words or to charge her with prevarication.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't know." And he departed, with his hands pushed down tight into the pockets of his rusty small-clothes.

Upon which she, being a woman right down to the very bottom of her twelve-year-old development, called him back. "Piet," she said, "can you keep a secret?"

"Yes," he made answer stolidly, with a still lower push of his tightly-wedged arms.

"But I mean a real secret. Really truly. Never to tell nobody till somebody else tells you."

"Yes," said Piet, and lifted his blue eyes and looked at her.

"I'm going away for good," said Wendela, with a catch in her throat, and then, giving way to the very luxury of grief: "We shall never see each other any more."

Piet stood some moments immovable, his round pink and white face very troubled. At last he said sturdily:

"Never is a long word, Freule."

She was piqued. "You don't care," she cried. "You've been saying all along that things weren't as they used to be. You've got another sweetheart. I know you have."

"No, I haven't," interrupted Piet.

"Yes, you have. And you'll want me less than ever now I can't make you Lord of Deynum. Though I should never have done that, for you're only a peasant-boy. You're a bad boy, besides, and it was only my fun."

"I know that, but I'm not a bad boy," replied



Piet. "And you'll come back to Deynum when you've done."

"Done what? We're all going. Oh you stupid, the Castle is going to be sold."

"Sold," repeated the boy, just as his young mistress had done an hour ago. He gave such a dig with his fists that something cracked about his chubby, black-clothed body.

He was a slow-thinking boy: it took him a long time to work round to what he was in search of. Ultimately he said:

"I'll give you all my marbles. I'll give you the crystal one with the silver lamb inside."

"I don't want your marbles."

"Yes, you do, Freule. You've teased me about that silver one for weeks."

"I tell you I don't want 'em. I don't want anything. Never no more. You're a horrid boy. Go away. I thought you would have cried any amount about never seeing me again."

Piet Poster was utterly at a loss. "I'm dreadfully sorry," he said. "More than about anything. More than if Nick had died."

"Thank you! To compare me to your goat!" cried Wendela in high indignation.

"But boys don't cry, Freule, when they're sorry. I never cry, never since I was a little boy."

"You're a little boy still. And you cried when Mamma scolded you for letting Nick get among her flowers."

"That's different. Your Mamma didn't scold me, and then something made me cry; I couldn't help it. But I didn't cry when father thrashed me for it."

Wendela walked off, without condescending to further parley. She had seen Piet's father coming up along the lane. And she called back with sudden misgiving: "Remember, it's a fearful secret, Piet!"

The head-gardener heard the words. "What's this?" he said roughly to his son. "What mischief have you been up to again with the Freule?"

"It's no harm, father."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"It's a secret, father: I can't tell."

Poster was a brute. He struck the child a heavy blow on the head. "I'll teach you to answer me like that," he said. "Tell me this instant."

"I can't," said Piet, vainly trying to avoid a second blow. His father's curiosity was aroused. Piet Poster had a bad time of it that morning.

"They have no right to sell it," said Wendela to herself fiercely, again and again. "It is *mine*!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

## AN ARISTOCRAT'S IDEA OF THE LAW.

THE news was all over the village in a couple of hours. The head-gardener felt the more angry with his son for having deprived him of the "primeur."

The Baron knew that everyone knew—had he not ordered his steward to publish the tidings?—and in each meeting with each of his vassals lay hidden a fresh discrowning.

He locked himself up in his room. That was a weakness, and so he told himself. The Baroness went among her poor as usual, encountered, at every step, by red eyes and looks of dull despair. One or two tried to speak, but she motioned them imperiously into silence, and then inquired after their ailments, or the baby.

The Baron, in the solitude of his private-room had enough to occupy him. Never, perhaps, was a home of many centuries so hurriedly shifted from hand to hand, and two days supervened of ceaseless packing and much confusion. All that the Baron wished to retain was rapidly inventoried by the steward, and stowed away in the great drawing-room: the armour, the portraits, the safes with the plate and jewellery, and, above all, the archives. There was a great jumble

of it, all huddled pell-mell, boxes and chests, and heavy oak-cupboards, "to be arranged hereafter"; with his own hand the Baron had locked them. The servants were active, but flurried, some of them deeply grieved and aggrieved, others interested and amused.

The Baron sat before his account-books. They are seldom pleasant reading to an honest man, for an honest man is usually a poor one. To him, who had been quite honest, but very imprudent, they were unpleasant reading indeed. His recent losses on the Stock-Exchange had, in spite of all his computations, exceeded anything he could have imagined possible, and the crash of the last day's sale had made them irretrievable. He had seen the ripe apple falling into Count Rexelaer's lap, and, with a sudden impulse, had dashed it away to the Belgian. And with the Baron there was no question of mere rivalry or malice in this solemn struggle to keep the dead lion's skin unsullied by the shoulders of the Pseudo-Rexelaer. It was the one duty he still owed to his dying race, that it should die.

The Count at the Hague would undoubtedly have paid more than any other living man—it was this which Strum had rightly taken into consideration; had the Count not been willing to assume the entire weight of the mortgages? And the Baron could well have used the money. To pay off the entire debt on the estate, and to meet the demand from his brokers, he must sell whatever funded property he possessed, and yet, count up his assets as often as he would, he still always found himself confronted by a deficit of fifty thousand florins. It is a small sum to have, but it is

an immense sum to want. He must have it to save him from bankruptcy. Yet—be it noted at once—this does not mean that he was absolutely penniless. It means, unfortunately, that some thirty thousand florins of his wife's little property had been unexpectedly swallowed up in the vortex, but an income of four thousand (£330) still remained secure, this being derived from a fund not under his control, of which Strum, as the family-notary, was hereditary trustee. It was Rexelaer-money, the sum having been set aside by a head of the house in the seventeenth century, with the especial object of forming a small annual allowance to be paid, in perpetuity, to the wife of the reigning lord, under the name of "The Lady's Dole." It had been so paid to this day.

"The Notary Strum is waiting," announced Gustave in a loud voice, after having twice vainly coughed. It was Gustave's peculiarity to indicate everyone as far as possible by his trade or profession. "There are too many masters now-a-days," he said. "Look at me. I am plain Gustave Gorgel." And he would throw out his chest and look very big and splendid. The words were modest.

The Baron started and dropped his pen. "Just so," he said. "Let him come in. You find me very busy, Strum. It has come so unexpectedly, this decision to go abroad. But I hope the change will do Mevrouw good. She is looking very white."

"Mevrouw has always looked white," said Strum. He sat down, all of a piece, as if he were afraid of dropping some part of himself and losing it. He was calmly contented. The sale would bring him in a large

profit, and he would probably become agent to an absentee owner. The Baron was a fool not to have preferred the better buyer, but that was the Baron's business. He, Strum, had done his duty.

"Still, I hope the climate of Germany will do her good," said Mynheer van Rexelaer.

"The climate of Germany is large, Mynheer. Which part of it is to benefit the Baroness?"

"I—I am not certain as yet where we shall go."

"You are only certain, Mynheer, that you must be gone." Strum dropped his eyes over his great gloved hands, and spread out the hands on his knees. The shadow of the majesty of Deynum had lain over him ever since his babyhood. In another day or two he would be rid of these Rexelaers for ever. Ouf!

"Strum," said the Baron, roused to his duty by the Notary's insolence. "We are ruined. You know it. It would have broken your good father's heart, had he lived to see this day."

"My good father's heart was continually breaking, but he managed to live very well on the fragments. 'Never mind a cracked heart,' I have heard him say, 'if only your head be sound.'"

For the moment the Baron felt agreeably cooled by this succession of douches. It was quite easy, he found, to confront his old dependents, if they remained indifferent to, or even secretly gloried in, his discomfiture.

"I have sent for you, sir," he said haughtily, "to transact business. There is one point especially which I must speak about. The fund under your administration, known as 'The Lady's Dole,' amounts at present,

I believe, to a sum total of about one hundred thousand florins. I speak under correction?"

The Notary nodded, and blinked his eyes behind their spectacles.

"According to the terms of the settlement that money becomes the property of the last representative of the house, as soon as it is absolutely certain that there will be no more Baronesses van Rexelaer. That time has come. The certainty has existed for several years. There will be no more Baronesses van Rexelaer."

The Notary shrugged his shoulders.

"I require the money now to pay off the mortgages. That is to say: I require half of it. We must sell out."

"But your own private property, Mynheer?" began young Nicholas in—for him—an insinuating tone.

"I require the money," repeated the Baron in a louder voice. "And, according to the terms of the settlement, as I say, there is no reason for reserving it any longer."

The Notary took off his spectacles and commenced carefully rubbing them. And then a sly leer crept over his naked-looking face—we all know the suddenly undressed appearance of these short-sighted eyes—and he murmured:

"Except the fortunate fact that your lady is not yet deceased."

"What has that to do with it?" cried the Baron indignantly. "Do you expect Mevrouw to object? Shall we have her in?"

"No, no," cried the Notary hastily.

"I should think not," said Mynheer van Rexelaer, sinking back in scorn. "As I pointed out, Mevrouw is the last of those who could possibly be entitled to the interest, and she will be only too glad to forego it, if the capital can be used on my behalf and her own."

"But, unfortunately, trustees must be guided by their trust alone. Mine enjoins me to preserve the capital intact as long as there exists, or can exist, a consort of a Rexelaer van Deynum. It can therefore only be paid over to your widow or, if you survive the Baroness, to your daughter after your death. Surely you see that."

But he did not see it, simple-minded gentleman that he was. "Am I to believe," he cried nervously, "that you refuse me this money which belongs by rights to my wife and myself? Surely *you* can understand that she is the last Baroness."

Strum readjusted his spectacles and looked down.

"You refuse?" cried the Baron hotly, rising in his seat. "Yes or no?"

Strum pushed back his chair with a grating jerk along the floor. "And supposing the Baroness were to die," he said roughly. "Supposing you were to marry again. You are barely sixty. Supposing——"

"Hold," shouted the Baron, beside himself. "You insult me. I shall not marry again. I want this money. I must have it. *Must*; do you hear? It is the only possible means of avoiding disgrace. For centuries your ancestors have been the faithful servants of an illustrious house. I am an old man; you are a young one. For the last time I ask you: Will you rescue the name



of Rexelaer?" He breathed hard. Oh the humiliation of this pleading!

"I can't do it," burst out Nicholas with an oath. He was moved, in spite of his common sense. "You want to make a dishonest man of me. I won't. And my dead father whom you always respected——"

"Go," thundered the Baron, pointing to the door.

"Why didn't you sell to Count Rexelaer, Mynheer the Baron?" Strum went on recklessly. "I had arranged it all for you, and there would have been money enough." He came nearer; a sudden idea had seized him. "The heirlooms," he suggested eagerly, with the old smile of suppliant impertinence upon his speckled face. "The portraits and all the rest? Count Rexelaer would give a lot for those?"

And then, in the dimness and the whirlwind, the Baron struck him.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE SPOILER AND THE SPOILED.

THE Baron was very, very sorry as he sat alone, once more, among his litter of papers and account-books. That is the worst of a good man's forgetting himself, he is obliged to remember afterwards. While he still smiled at the other's threats of vengeance, the vengeance had already begun in his own awakening remorse. Yet he might well have dreaded Strum's seeming impotence, could he have read the future. We seldom can, but of one thing we may be certain. The revenge of the weakest cuts deepest, because most subtly planned.

"There is one thing I should like to know," said Gustave, standing, stiff and smart, by the Baron's elbow. That gentleman turned in annoyance.

"I believed Mynheer had answered my knock. I beg pardon," continued the servant, whose prevarications were always virtuous. He governed his master, to a certain extent, by alert apology.

"Well, what is it? Be quick."

"It is an impertinence, Mynheer the Baron." Generous natures, as Gustave well knew, condone a fault confessed.

"Then be impertinent. It would not be for the first time."

"Mynheer the Baron confuses me in his memory with the coachman. What I would venture to ask—begging pardon—is this." He stopped. "You remember, Mynheer, when we were children here together?"

"Yes. Is that what you intruded on me to ask?"

"And you remember, Mynheer, when I got you your saddle after Waterloo—we were both twelve then—you remember?—the King's Wine?"

"Of course I remember. Things are bad enough, Gustave. Don't make them worse."

"And you remember," continued Gustave, speaking faster and faster, and louder and louder, "the war of 1830, you officer and I corporal. You remember Antwerp and the Hero Chassé and the great charge, and your wound, and how I found you, and the King's Wine again? How we thrashed them, the blue blouses! How they ran, the cowards! You remember, Major? And the Prince telling the army you were not only the noblest of his nobles, but the bravest of his soldiers, too!"

The man's voice had risen to a cry of triumph. His master was scratching an envelope with a pen.

"And you remember, Mynheer," Gustave went on after a moment of sad silence, "our coming home to the Baroness, and later on the birth of the Freule, and all."

"Great Heaven," cried the Baron, lifting up a haggard face. "Am I likely, in my grave, to forget?"

"What I mean, Mynheer, is that we have always, so to say, borne everything—begging your pardon—together, from the cradle. Not that it has anything to

do with my question, which is just this, saving your Presence. Is there ready money enough for this sudden emergency, Mynheer, or is there not?"

"There is not," cried the Baron, whose nerves were by this time altogether unstrung, "and if that scoundrel of a Notary has been chattering on his way downstairs——"

"No one has said anything, Mynheer. But I imagined it might be possible, in the unexpectedness of the change. And that brings me to what I wanted to say. It is only right, of course, that Mynheer should have secrets from me. But I have long had a secret from Mynheer, and that was wrong."

The Baron looked up vaguely, waiting for more.

"I—I," stammered Gustave, quite at a loss, despite his martial bearing. "Mynheer has always had my savings in his keeping"—an expectant frown gathered on his master's face—"that is nothing. I mean the savings. But a number of years ago a cousin of mine left me fifteen thousand francs. I never told you, Mynheer. I was afraid you would want me to use the money, in a shop or something. And I left it with the rascally broker, to take care of it for me."

"And of course it is gone," said the Baron. "Well, you have fortunately still your savings, which are secure in my keeping, as you say."

Gustave smoothed his grey hair shamefacedly.

"I am afraid it is different, Mynheer," he replied with an apologetic smile. "The broker advised me to speculate with the money, as I didn't know what else to do with it. What was I to do with it, I that in my young time, when you never have enough, could not

even pay the Vivandière? It came too late, that's the truth. I was here, and had all I wanted. The interest accumulated, and the speculations succeeded, and now, what with my savings and this money, I'm worth sixty thousand florins, the broker says."

"You are a singularly lucky man," said the Baron bitterly.

The other shook his head. "I don't know about that," he replied, "if I may make so bold as to differ. I didn't want the money, but I liked the speculating, after a time. It's amusing, Mynheer. But of late I've had scruples. Especially of nights, and they're dreadful, are scruples, worse than fleas, if I may be forgiven for saying so, for you can't catch them, and they go on biting, after they've had enough and you've said you were sorry. I don't think it's a nice way of earning money; it's a better way of losing it."

"You think so, do you? You speak from the winner's point of view." The Baron's eyes went wandering away over his open books.

"Well, you see, Mynheer, one man's winnings are another man's losings, aren't they? It's like cards. And what I can't understand is that I who never would touch a card in barracks should take to playing on 'Change in after life." He shook his head over this enigma, an old tormentor.

"Well, don't grumble at your luck," said the Baron impatiently. He was disgusted with himself for being jealous—of his servant.

"If I grumble at anything, it's my conscience, Mynheer. I wish the abominable thing were dead. It don't do to have a conscience and speculate. I don't feel

happy about my winnings. I never earned them. I've stolen them from somebody, the somebody that lost, as at cards. I've stolen them from you, Mynheer. Lord forgive me; the word's out! And I wish you'd take the money back."

"And who told you I speculated? How dare you speak to me like that?" cried the Baron fiercely. On any other day he might have been affectionate, but on this he was angry.

"I told you it was an impertinence, Mynheer. I can only say: Forgive me. Mine was American railways too, Mynheer, whatever they may be. It's always American railways. So you see, it's your own money I've got. I've taken it from you and Mevrouw and the Freule. And I do wish, for God's sake, and my own peace of soul, you'd take it back again!"

He actually held out a bundle which he had drawn from his bulgy tail-pocket. His voice was passionate with hope. He felt like a highwayman, making restitution.

"Take the things away," said the Baron testily, pushing the outstretched arm aside. "You are indeed impertinent, as you say. And what you propose is absurd, Gustave, as well as improper. Be thankful that, now you must leave me, you will be able to live in luxury." And then he drew down his old comrade's face close to his own, and looked into his eyes. "I can't take the money, dear fellow," he said. "God bless you, It is you must forgive me. We shall think of some other way."

"I want no leave-takings," the Baron had said

several times during that crowded morning. "I could not bear that." The Baroness had not answered at first; later on she had said: "There is nothing unbearable. Hell must be bearable, Reinout, or Satan would die. We must not count on incapacity for suffering."

The child was very silent, surprised that no one alluded to her sacrilege of the preceding day. They were to leave next morning early and go into temporary lodgings at Cleves, on the other side of the German frontier. "About one thing I am resolved," said the Baron. "I must never see this place again." The contract was to be signed that evening; the Marquis could take possession next day. A woman, Loripont's wife, had been telegraphed for, and the great mansion was to be abandoned to these three.

"Get a bottle of the wine, Gustave," said the Baron at dinner, sitting erect before his untouched plate, "and you shall have a glass of it too. I have had it moved to the drawing-room with the rest. No one else shall own it. Least of all a Belgian." They were a little dramatic in those terrible days. It was their salvation. To some lives there come moments when we cannot jog on in the midway of existence; we must either sink utterly, or soar. The child's thoughts were preoccupied with Piet Poster. She despised herself for eating her dinner.

The meal was drawing to a close, when Gustave slipped through a narrow opening between the heavy oak-doors. "The people are here, Mynheer," he said, "come to wish your Nobleness good-bye and God-speed."

"The people?" cried the Baron. "Who?"

"Everybody," replied Gustave, and threw wide the doors.

The far side of the hall was full of faces under the soft light of its stained glass, and with the glitter of the armour on both sides between grim portraits and masses of late flowers and greenery. The leaders were huddled together in front. Dievert the steward, and the head-gardener and the coachman, with the other in and out-door servants, and behind them the great farmers with their substantial wives, and the tradesmen from the village, and behind these again a medley of retainers and dependents, pressing the others forward, as the doors opened, till the whole vestibule was occupied. A flood of red-cheeked, awkward faces, the men in tight-fitting black, the wives in print jackets and far-stretching caps, belaced, befrilled, be-ribboned and be-starched. A crowd which had been anxious to put in an appearance, but which would feel far more comfortable when once again outside.

The Baron looked from one to another till his eyes rested on Bulbius, in a corner by the door. "This is most kind," he stammered. "I am at a loss——" Then he stopped, seeing that the steward was about to make a speech. He rose and came forward, with his wife and child.

The steward, Dievert, was a supremely self-conscious man, corpulent, important, inclined to look warm. He looked very warm indeed as he began his carefully prepared oration:

"Mynheer the Baron, our highly respective—respected landheer, we, that is all those who are in



any way connected with your property of Deynum, we have—we are——” He stuck.

“Dreadfully sorry you’re going away,” said a voice from the back.

The steward frowned, but this outrage suddenly restored him to the full command of his diminishing dignity. He launched safely into smooth floods of laudatory eloquence, praising the Baron, the Baroness, and all their ancestors and belongings, for all deeds done and undone, for their birth and their existence, for the death of such as had gone before. And as he heaped up his praises, his face grew warmer and warmer, and the Baron’s heart froze cold as stone. Simple-minded as the latter was, he could see clearly enough in such matters as belonged to his competence. He was well aware that Dievert was an honest steward who had never cheated his master above, and never beneath, the legitimate limit of a steward’s cheater.

“And now that the sun is to set upon our village,” perorated the spokesman of the peasantry, “now that ——” (suddenly he began wondering to himself what the new lord would be like, and the thought distracted his attention. He stuck again). “Now that—now then——”

“Now then,” said Wendela, too audibly, from her place by her mother’s side. There was a general laugh, and in the reaction a woman’s voice broke into shrill weeping. Others followed the tempting example. The speech was at an end.

“Thank you. Thank you,” said the Baron, shaking hands with the wet-eyed and the dry-eyed, the simpering, the stolid, and the sorrowful. He stood in the

entrance. In calmer moments he could have told you all about their sentiments and measured to an ounce (of groceries) the sympathy and sadness of every one of them.

"Come, Bulbius," he said, when it was over. "Come in and drink good luck to all of us."

"I can't, I can't," protested the Father in broken accents, and solemnly emptied the glass the Baron had poured out. Then, without more ado, he struck it against the side of the table, snapping it at the stem.

"Pray for us, reverend father," burst out the Baroness, "when we are gone. Pray for us night and day. You cannot pray enough. And peradventure——"

"Hush," he interrupted her. "Gracious lady, prayer has no peradventure. Alas that sometimes, in God's wisdom, adversity should be its Amen."

He turned away, to leave them, but at the door he looked round. "I forgot to tell you," he said. "Veronica has been in a terrible temper all day. At one moment I feared she was going to beat me. She has such a tender heart."

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## CHAPTER XX.

## THE MARQUIS'S HEIRS.

THE Marquis was restless. He walked up and down the room. For a moment a fictitious strength was upon him, and he rejoiced in it. The nun eyed him cautiously out of her little slits of eyes, under the solemn veil.

For there was a nun with him now, a Sister of Mercy. The Marquis wanted a hundred useless attentions in the constant changes of his whim. Nursing him was exhausting work, physically and mentally, for, in his continuous flight from himself, he could not be in repose, and he would not be alone.

And so every moment the sick man thought of something else he wanted, merely because it was something else. Loripont wearied under the perpetual strain, and shewed it. "Then get somebody till your wife comes," said his master. "Not longer. Get a sister. They hold their tongues." The woman had come that morning, and had ministered to the Marquis's wants all day. She was a fat, middle-aged woman, mealy, expressionless, button-eyed. She spoke in the shortest of sentences, and a sleepy voice.

"The house is exactly what I needed," said the Marquis for the twentieth time that day. He stopped

and vaguely eyed the monstrous lamp in the middle of the ceiling. "I shall be absolute master of my surroundings there, alone with the Loriponts, in a wide expanse of park. I could not have found better, had I hunted for years. Of course it is enormously expensive, but what matters money to a man who may be dead in a month?"

He walked a few steps farther and halted in front of the nun.

"What matters money," he repeated, "to a man who will be dead in a month?"

"Nothing," replied the nun. They had sent him one who understood a little French.

"And besides, the value of the estate remains. I offered him the lowest figure; it may not be a bad bargain after all. Absolute seclusion! I should say luck had befriended me, were it not that I knew that everything is possible to him that pays."

He rambled on, to himself, not to her, though he liked to have a human creature listening. In an hour they would be coming with the deed of purchase. Tomorrow he would hide himself, behind thick walls and wide woods, to shriek out his life if he chose. For the outside world, he would sink away into slow oblivion, and none of whilom "friends" would ever apprehend that the unconquerable Marquis had, in his turn, been conquered by the great Conqueror, Pain.

"What would it matter," continued M. de la Jolais, "whether I left behind me ten francs or ten million? The Vicomte, my dear cousin, would not get a penny, could I deprive him of his share. I hate him. And as

for my sister's child, whom I have never seen, why should I love her?"

"What do you say?" he asked, almost fiercely, turning on the Sister of Mercy. He did not much care what she said, as long as she talked.

"Nothing," replied Sister Constantia, smoothly, and went on watching him out of her half-closed eyes.

The Marquis sank into his large elbow-chair.

"A beautiful quality in a woman," he said half sneeringly, half smilingly. "Had Madame Cochonnard understood its value, I might now have had somebody worth leaving my money to. But she got into a habit of saying 'Yes!' the worst thing your sex can get into the habit of saying. Could you have loved a creature of the name of Cochonnard?"

The nun dropped her eyes. "We love no one, Monsieur," she said.

"A woman, I mean, of course," said the Marquis testily. "I do not forget to whom I am speaking."

"Ah——," said the nun slowly. "We love everybody, Monsieur. Yes, I could have loved anyone, whatever their name."

"Then excuse my saying, *ma sœur*, that you have no discriminating taste. Why, the very name is unpronounceable in society, so naturally the woman that bore it was dead there."

He fell into a reverie. "To whom would you leave your money," he said presently, "if you were dying, and had no one to leave it to?"

He talked thus constantly of dying. He had gone through all the experiences of horror and indignation indicated above. Yet never for one moment had he

realized the actuality of death. It was in him, yet outside him. He was present at the tragedy of himself.

But, for the moment, at any rate, he was alive.

"To my mother," replied Sister Constantia, "the common mother of us all. Lo, these are my mother and my brethren."

The Marquis made a grimace. "Yes, I know," he said. "It is a large family. But I have never felt attracted towards the Great Unwashed. That surely is pardonable in me, for I have always detested my relations."

"If I were dying," said the nun, roused from her placidity by his manner, "I would strive to make my peace with God."

"Hoity-toity," he answered. "I know what is meant by that. All of it to a lot of lazy priests for masses they never say! No, *ma sœur*, I am an upholder of religion—it is invaluable—but I am not a fool."

They were silent for some time; she being too angry to reply.

"Waste is wickedness," added the Marquis spitefully. "I never spent a penny, but I got a penny's worth for it."

"Pennies become pounds in the heavenly exchequer," replied Sister Constantia.

He rested his face on his hands; the face was thin, the hands yet thinner, long, slender and white.

When at last he moved again, he said, without looking at her: "I wonder, would it be worth while?"

She waited.

"Not to give it to the priests, mind you. I won't

give a penny to the priests. But to let the poor have it. Something must be done with it, and that way might have its advantages. Your convent, now, does it interest itself in the poor? I suppose so?"

"Indeed it does," said the sister. She opened her eyes wide, not that it made them any wider.

"Well, I must see. I have never thought it out before. I have never realized, nor wished to realize, the idea of having heirs. The old Baron here, I fancy, suggested the subject, and I daresay my 'poor relations' will do as well as anybody else. That means 'the monkeys,' doesn't it? I don't mean those; I mean the other set, the canaille. Peu-ah, it is an unpleasant subject. Oblige me by fetching Antoine."

Antoine, who had been lying down for a too short rest, appeared with sullen face. "I am lonely," said the Marquis. "I must have something to amuse me. You, to-morrow you will have your wife. I don't know whether she amuses you, but she keeps you occupied. I think I should like to have some of the horses; there is sure to be plenty of room at that place. Write and tell them to send 'Jeanneton,' and 'Sooty Jack,' and 'Veuve Cliquot.' It will amuse me to look at them. And I might as well have the dogs—the house-dogs—from Brussels."

"But, if Monsieur le Marquis wishes it to remain unknown that he is here——"

"Tiens, that is true." How weak his head must be growing! "I fear I shall have to give up the idea. I am sorry. But tell them to send 'Jeanneton.' A groom can travel with her to the frontier, and you must fetch her there. I have been thinking, if there was anyone I

should care to take leave of, and I have set my heart on seeing 'Jeanneton' again. She certainly is the one creature who loves me."

"Monsieur le Marquis forgets the dogs," said the valet calmly.

"She must be lonely, poor beast, among a lot of servants. She can't abide servants, like myself. And, perhaps, after all, I shall get better, and ride her. These doctors are constantly mistaken."

"They are," said Antoine.

The Marquis abandoned his listless attitude. "Do you know," he asked eagerly, "of their making a mistake in a case like mine?"

"Yes," replied Antoine, who had that morning heard the tale, through Bulbius, from Veronica. "I know of a case of a lady whom all the doctors had given up." And he launched into a wonderful account of some homœopathic cure. "I do not believe a word of it," interposed the sick man occasionally, as he sat drinking in the glad details. He was quite vexed when the arrival of the notary and his two clerks interrupted the story. A few minutes later the Baron appeared. He held out his hand to Strum, who ignored it.

The deed was read, the usual formalities were gone through, the necessary arrangements were made for the transfer of the purchase-money. The only "incident" of any importance occurred when the Baron van Rexelaer passed across a slip of folded paper to M. de la Jolais. The Marquis read, "Will you permit the clause to be added, that the Chapel remain intact?"

"But certainly," said M. de la Jolais.



And then came the signing of the names. For the last time the Baron, now signing away his manorial rights, would call himself by the name which had been handed down to him through five slow centuries. He laid down the pen. Then, hurriedly seizing it, he sprawled the words across the page. And he buried his hands deep in his pockets, lest any should notice how they trembled.

Under this signature came the Marquis's in neat little letters: Joseph Xavier Hippolyte de la Jolais-Farjolle de Saint Leu."

"Et de Deynum," said the Baron aloud, in the bitter scorn of his heart. And then he coloured scarlet, for regret of the unheeding insult, as it seemed, to M. de la Jolais. No one spoke.

When, all being over, the Baron van Rexelaer was preparing to slip away, M. de la Jolais called him back. To Strum the Marquis said: "Wait downstairs, if you please. I may still have need of you." Strum bowed, with a grin.

The Baron put down his hat again, greatly flurried. Had the Belgian perhaps heard—through that villain Strum—of the impending bankruptcy? Was he going to offer help? If so, it must be declined, but the offer would render easier and more acceptable the Baron's own proposal, that terrible, inevitable proposal to which he had been screwing up his courage all day long.

The Marquis waited till they were quite alone—in that quite-alone-ness which does not come until a few moments after the door has been closed. Then he

said: "Do you know any cases, Monsieur, in which doctors have been seriously mistaken in their diagnosis of the stomach?"

"I know very little," replied Mynheer Rexelaer, "about any diseases at all." "He wants to lead up to something," he thought, "I wonder what."

"You will know some day," said the Marquis grimly, "about one disease—your own. Then you do not think you can answer my question affirmatively?"

"I fear not."

The Marquis had been suddenly elated, he was now as unreasonably cast down. Dying men do not only catch at straws; they see them floating where there is merely a ripple on the water.

"Then forgive me for detaining you. Let me thank you once more, Monsieur, now we are alone, for your great kindness in abandoning to me your beautiful mansion so soon." He closed his eyes.

But the Baron stayed on. "Forgive *me*," he began, "if before I leave you, I venture——"

But the Marquis, who never consciously interrupted his equals, had not even heard the other speak, so busy was he with his own thoughts. "My heirs must give the place its due," he said.

The Baron was much disconcerted. "I am deeply grateful, at any rate," he replied, "that it will remain in Catholic hands. The Vicomte de la Jolais, I have no doubt, when the effervescence of youth is past, will make an excellent lord of Deynum."

"The Vicomte will never make an excellent anything, Monsieur. There is one fault for which I know no

pardon: it is disrespect and disobedience to the head of the house. For these I have disinherited nearer relations than the Vicomte."

"I do not believe in disinheriting," said the Baron gruffly. "Family-money is family-property. For the chance possessor to divert it to strangers is a crime."

"The word is a strong one," protested the Marquis, nettled. "And a woman, then, who disgraces herself?"

"Her children are not to blame for that," answered the Baron obstinately. "And if the woman be the God-appointed heiress, then that woman in God's name. Never a stranger. Not as long as the blood-claim is there."

"Tiens, Madame Cochonnard!" said the Marquis. "Well, perhaps you are right, although it is you—permit me to say so, Monsieur—who have just resolutely excluded Count Rexelaer from Deynum."

The other's face grew purple. "There is no blood-claim *there*," he said vehemently. "Never now—thank Heaven—shall Count Rexelaer have any connection with Deynum."

Monsieur de la Jolais fixed his eyes upon the speaker's excited face. "I am in doubt what to do," he said slowly. "Advise me. The poor are one's relations, say the preachers. Why not leave one's money to them?"

"I am a good Catholic," replied the Baron, unhesitatingly, "but I would not rob those of my own house to buy a mansion for myself in heaven."

"Well, I daresay you are right, though it is strange that you should be the man to give me this advice.

Under all circumstances you think the natural law should take its course? So be it. Making wills is a nuisance; I have always avoided it. I fancy it attracts death. Good-night."

The Baron retained the door-handle in his hand, awkwardly. "There is still one thing," he stammered. "One moment, Monsieur de la Jolais. I—I find there are a number of articles—plate and so on—and—and pictures, excluded as private property, for which I should have no use on my travels. Some of the objects and portraits are very valuable——" He hesitated.

"I am much obliged to you, mon cher Baron," said the Marquis stiffly. "I wish you had mentioned the subject sooner. Plate marked with your crest, or family-portraits, I should hardly require. But we might see later on. Good-night, cher Baron; I am very tired."

He rang for his valet as soon as the Baron had departed. "Send that Notary away," he said, "I don't require him. I have changed my mind."

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## CHAPTER XXI.

J'OSE!

THE results of the unusual fatigue the Marquis had undergone soon made themselves felt. After a short and restless slumber he awoke in an agony of suffering. It was eleven o'clock. He called for Antoine and demanded morphia. The drug was given him, but, for the first time, it seemed entirely to miss its effect. A paroxysm of mingled passion and despair seized hold of him and shook him. Doubtless there was something wrong with the solution. He must have it seen to. He must have a different opiate. He must have a doctor. Till now he had resolutely refused to call in the little practitioner from Rollingen.

A messenger was immediately dispatched with a country-chaise. Then followed a horrible hour of anxiety and fruitless activity for the valet, the sister, all the people of the inn—a ceaseless hurrying to and fro, and whispering, and preparing of various things that were vainly passed from hand to hand. The patient lay among his pillows and moaned.

At last the doctor came. They had hoped everything from him; he could do nothing. The quality of his morphia was inferior to that of the Marquis's. He stood irresolute by the bedside. The sick man mo-

tioned him nearer. "Go out of the room, you others!" cried the Marquis. "Go!"

Then, turning to the doctor:

"This is cancer," he said.

The doctor nodded and replied in a low voice. "So I feared." He was a kind-hearted man.

"I have had these attacks of late. How long will they last?"

"Ah, Monsieur, it is impossible to say. They may——"

"Do not lie to me. The case is absolutely hopeless."

The doctor looked down at his boots.

"Absolutely hopeless," repeated the invalid, with a ring of hope and the faintest interrogation in his voice. He sat up, clutching at his breast. "Answer me. You need not answer. I see it in your face. I have known it for a week, for centuries. Absolutely hopeless." He fell back.

"But, my dear sir," began the doctor in that terrible, encouraging doctor's voice, "you have still many months before you. It is impossible to say what may occur."

"A year?" gasped the patient.

"Oh, most certainly a year, I should say. Very probably more."

"And this pain? It will increase?"

"You must not think too much of the future. For the moment——"

"Thank you," burst out the sick man, with sudden strength. "Go! Thank you! Antoine! Where is that scoundrel, Antoine?" He struck his hand-bell,

till it broke under his hand. The servant came running in. "Get me paper and pen and ink. The quicker the better. Farewell, doctor; my servant will pay you. I am better. The pain is gone. I do not feel it. The paper, you blockhead! In the dressing-case. Be quick." He lay back and wrote a few rapid words. "I have never done it before," he said to Antoine when he had finished, "but I daresay it is right like that. You can sign your name underneath: I suppose somebody must witness it. It is valid, I know it is valid. There, I have done my share of the business, and the good God must do His."

The thing was done. In the half-light of the shaded lamp the signatures were appended. The Marquis handed the paper to Antoine. "Take good care of it," he said. "And now, remember, I died of pneumonia. Swear on the little image. Where is it? Swear."

In the stillness of that strange sick-chamber Antoine swore, trembling, the oath required of him.

"That is right," said the Marquis. "You can leave me. Go downstairs. I am going to sleep."

He closed his eyes but, as soon as he was alone, he again opened them wide. He stared vaguely, into the black distance.

"Peut-être," he said aloud.

Then he got up slowly, out of bed. It was true, as he had said, that he felt no pain for the moment. But he was so weak that he had to drag himself along the floor. He was old, and white-haired, and very weary. As he laboriously pushed along, he struck his arm against a shaky little table. The costly bouillon-

cup upon it fell to the ground with a crash. "Aha," he said.

He dragged himself towards a black leather-bag which lay in a corner. This he opened, and from its recesses he drew a small velvet case. Out of the case he extracted a toy revolver, ivory-inlaid, and, placing the weapon against his left temple, he drew the trigger.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE HOME OF POESY.

A LARGE house on a grim canal—a number of flat, uninteresting windows in a flat, uninteresting façade. A low front-door, with a heavy greystone coping, and on each side, along the narrow “stoep,” a row of stumpy stone posts, connected by iron chains. The rest of it a great daub of dirty orange plaster, without any excrescence or salient feature, except just one little rusty spy-glass sticking out on the basement-floor—the whole building like a meaningless, rich man’s face, in its ugly and insolent self-content, comfortably dull. Young Reinout’s home at the Hague.

And opposite, and on both sides of it, similar dwellings, of darker colour, flat and grey, under the lowering sky and the general gloom and primness, with the foul canal asleep in the middle of the grass-grown street. A grand house in a grand neighbourhood.

Count Hilarius van Rexelaer drove up to his own door in the neatest of little broughams and entered hurriedly. His whole manner betrayed anxiety, but, then, as we have seen, he had an irritable way about him and a habitual nervous twitch of the eyes. He was a man harassed by many things, who took life restlessly.

He passed through the low entrance-hall with its damp marble floor and ran upstairs to a comparatively brighter part of the house. He looked into his wife's boudoir; it was empty, but sounds to which he was well accustomed were issuing from the conservatory beyond. A sweet voice was shakily crooning some French words:

"D'un seul regard il m'a tuée,  
Car ce regard resta le seul."

The singing stopped at the sound of the opening door. A copper-coloured mulatto woman, in iridescent drapery, rose up from the floor and made obeisance, as her master entered. The Countess Rexelaer lifted a slow head from her divan: "Ah, mon ami! Bonjour!" she said, and let it fall again.

"It is most vexatious," began the Count, spitting his words, as the French inelegantly but aptly put it. "There is nothing but worry. I can't stand the strain. I shall have to resign." He stopped, and scowled at the waiting woman.

"Laissez," said the Countess languidly, "fetch me a glass of Cape-wine and a biscuit——" and, as soon as the mulatto had crept noiselessly away—"It is no use, my dear Rexelaer: I tell her everything you tell me."

The husband pushed aside a green parrot which had slipped from its perch on to a low chair by the couch, and having thus freed a seat for himself, he sat down, unheeding of the disturbed favourite's flutter and fuss. "Come here, Rollo. Poor Rollo. Pretty Rollo," interposed the lady. "Oh bother, listen to me, Margot," said the Count. When he called her "Margot," she

knew that he was either very much pleased or very much put out. She herself had officially decreed, on becoming a Countess, that her name should henceforth be Margherita. "Pearl, for you, if you like, Hilarius." He had long ago left off calling her "Pearl."

"Well, what is it?" she asked faintly. "You must not tire me to-day. The damp has given me my headache."

Said Count Hilarius solemnly: "The King had a bad egg for breakfast this morning."

The Countess laughed, but indolently, as one who has more serious things to occupy her thoughts.

"You laugh!" cried the Count in sudden wrath, "because you do not understand. By Heaven, it is no laughing matter. Who is responsible for the eggs? I. If it happens again, I shall resign."

"Nonsense," she said, sitting up, alert and sharp.

"Ah, that brings you round, does it? I tell you my nerves can't stand the strain. This is the third time since Tuesday week. The eggs are new-laid, of course, but some wretched little red mess gets inside them. I suppose it's the food. None of the underpeople can explain, and his Majesty is furious—rightly—and says it never occurred before. And I only three weeks in office!"

"It must not occur again," said Margherita, "not if we have to lay the eggs ourselves."

"To have chickens here, you mean?"

"Of course, I mean that. I do not believe the poor animals are to blame. It is the result of a conspiracy. You say yourself that all the Court people are against you, because they wanted your place for

the Chamberlain's cousin. Be sure that an enemy inserts into the eggs the unpleasantnesses which his Majesty finds there."

"You think so?" he said doubtfully.

"I am sure of it. We can keep the fowls here in the conservatory, if needs must, and Laïssa can feed them." She was sufficiently animated now.

"True," said the Count, rising, "you could easily add them to the menagerie. But, perhaps it were better to abandon the whole thing. These Court cliques are terrible in their dead-set against a new-comer. They are merciless."

"What?" cried the Countess, leaning on one brown, jewelled arm. Then she added in softest scorn: "Coward!"

"Oh yes, it is easy enough for you to speak. You haven't got to face them! You simply stop at home and say: 'Make a great lady of me!'"

"Already?" she went on. "Three weeks of failure after six years of struggle. Coward, Coward, Coward!" She leaped to her feet with the last words, her eyes flashing. "Yes," she said, "I am going to be a great lady. I have paid for it. And I again say: Go and make a great lady of me. Go!" Then, suddenly, she laughed, and threw herself back on the sofa. "You should have studied poultry-fancying in your youth, my lord Comptroller," she said. "We must get Reinout some pigeons, pretty innocent things. My uncle de Cachenard——"

"Ah, spare me your uncle de Cachenard," he said angrily, and walked from the room.

The Countess, left alone, arranged the coils of her magnificent black hair and smiled to her Creole face in the glass. Then she looked round and said, "Coo-ee, Coo-ee," and the mulatto-woman came gliding back.

Count Hilarius had not been wrong in speaking of the menagerie. "Aviary" would perhaps have been a more accurate term, for the whole place was in a flutter of exotic birds. It was suffocatingly hot, an unavoidable concession to the animals in question, and not an unwilling one on the part of their mistress, whose natural tastes preferred the sun to any and every thing in creation except herself, but awarded the third place—a long way below—to a blazing hot fire. "A good stove," she used to say, "is like a husband—ça réchauffe. But the sun is like a lover—ça brûle."

She had built out this large glass house at the back of her dull little boudoir, and had stocked it with a store of greenery, feathery ferns and wide palms and a number of prickly tropical plants. She had orange-blossoms in it, and a mass of gardenias, and the strong perfume of these starry flowers mingled very perceptibly with the odour of the birds. As for these, a whole lot of them lived in open cages among the verdure, a bright-plumaged, twittering, unmusical rainbow of colours—"nature's jewels," said the Countess, toying with the diamonds she persistently wore on her arm. "If I am to be buried alive," she had said, when first brought to the house in the Hague, "at least, I will have a hole in my grave, through which to see the earth and the flowers." She lived in her conservatory. She was always cold, and she used to repeat, with an unpleasing

grin, that she never expected to be warm again—on earth.

The Countess sipped her wine. She was very sensitive and could only take nourishment at irregular hours. And her digestion was a weak one; wholesome food disagreed with it. She ate sweetmeats and cakes in indefinite quantities out of boxes and bonbonnières which were always left lying about. Often the various animals would get at these receptacles, and then would ensue much brief exultation and subsequent sorrow, and stains on the oriental carpets and silk hangings, not that anybody noticed the more recent ones among the many of earlier date.

The copper-coloured woman crouched down at a little distance from her mistress's divan, and one of the parrots, settling down on her shoulder, began screeching, "Laïssa," which name, by-the-bye, was a corruption of Eliza. For the mulatto's mother, an exceedingly vain personage, had declared herself and her daughter, in a moment of presumption, to be of English extraction, and had stuck to the story ever after on account of its unreasonableness. Black? There were many Englishmen born black. Satan himself was an Englishman, as every good Catholic in Rio could have told you.

"You want to know, I suppose," said the Countess. "Eh?"

"I? But no, M'am Rita. Let me sing you your song again, and you can go to sleep." And once more Laïssa began rocking herself to and fro and moaning:

"Sous les tilleuls j'étais couchée.  
Il a passé sous les tilleuls.  
D'un seul regard il m'a tuée,  
Car ce regard resta le seul."

The woman crooned the words over and over without paying any attention to their meaning, while her mistress—who was the author of their being—lay listening with half-closed eyes of content.

"The idea is beautiful," said the Countess at last, interrupting the endless chant, "but the execution might be better. Rhymes a, a, are all right, but not rhymes b, b. Do you think, Laïssa, that 'tilleuls' rhymes with 'seul'?"

"Very well indeed, M'am Rita," replied the mulatto.

"Ah, you always say 'very well indeed,' but that does not satisfy my literary aspirations. You are not a literary character, Laïssa."

"No, M'am Rita," said the woman submissively.

"Do you know, you stupid, what a literary character is?"

"No, my jewel. Is it something bad?"

"It is the grandest thing on earth; it is an angel. Especially when it is a genius. I often think that I should have been a genius, Laïssa, had I not been a woman."

"A woman is a very good thing too," said Laïssa. "I daresay men like the women best."

"Do not expose your boundless ignorance, even to me. Pass me the rhyme-dictionary; Rollo is scratching

it. Naughty Rollo. I must look up another rhyme for 'seul.' Aïeul. How would that do?"

"Sous les tilleuls il m'a passée  
Sous les tilleuls de mon aïeul."

"I don't care for the repetition of the same sound, though some people might consider it musical. No, I have it. This is better, and has a delightfully aristocratic ring:

"Dans le jardin il m'a trouvée  
Du beau château de mon aïeul,  
D'un seul regard il m'a tuée,  
Car ce regard resta le seul.'"

"Sing it, Nursie; let me hear how it goes. Ah me, the words awaken painful memories. A castle of our fathers! I shall never forgive the Count that he has not been able to procure me one."

"The saints will help, dearie," said the mulatto soothingly.

"For shame, how often must I tell you not to talk of saints! They are angry with me for turning Protestant. Let sleeping dogs lie."

"Well, then we must try the cards," said the mulatto. "Shall I lay them for you, my pet, while you eat some chocolate-creams?"

"Yes, do," replied the Countess cheerfully. "I must compose a second stanza this afternoon; my head is too tired. Give me the box, off the watering-pot. No, no, Rollo. Go away. Down, Flora! Ah, there is a capital conjunction—the aces!—the aces!—turn up the other ace—that's right! Oh you dear, good Laïssa!" She bent forward over the cards, a chocolate-cream in her



hand. "Something fortunate is going to happen! Delightful!" And she unthinkingly clapped her hands and smashed the sweetie.

"Something fortunate is going to happen," repeated the mulatto gravely, as she continued to spread the cards on the Turkish carpet before her. "Great riches—but these you do not want, honey. You have enough."

"Never enough," dissented the Countess vehemently, pushing her hand in among the cards. "My uncle de Cachenard was a rich man; I hate him for not leaving me everything."

"In my country," said the mulatto, "a yard of cotton and a few figs. It is enough."

"Less than that," cried Margherita passionately. "No cotton at all, and one fig, and the blazing sunshine! For the animal it is enough. But for the soul within me a hundred millions, to buy splendour and power and greatness! I want rivers of diamonds, oceans of diamonds. And emeralds, and sapphires, and rubies!" She stopped for breath and bit off a fragment of chocolate.

"Yes, diamonds are pretty: I was not thinking of diamonds," replied the waiting-woman, still continuing her combinations. "And other jewels; you shall have them, my pretty! See, here comes the Queen of Diamonds again. You shall have a beautiful castle. It is coming, just the kind that you like."

The Countess laughed. "An ancestral home," she said, "ordered in from the bazar! No, my good Laïssa, the old man at Deynum says 'no' to the Queen of

Diamonds. It is impudent of him, for he has not the necessary money himself, and should make room for his betters. You may have my brooch with the turquoises; I shall not wear it again."

"Thank you, child," replied Laïssa. "But, for me, I believe in the cards."

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

## AND OF STATECRAFT.

THE master of the house meanwhile, in his library, stood disconsolately gazing at the imitation bindings behind which his cigar-cases reposed in security. They could afford him as little assistance as the long line of the "Taschenbuch der gräflichen Häuser," or even the encyclopædia. He had built his hopes upon the latter, and had vainly looked out a couple of words, winding up with "alimentation." And now he had sent round his man to the bookseller's.

Little things always troubled him largely, but this, as he well knew, was not a little thing. It is a merciful dispensation that, in the moment of achievement, we first begin to realize the difficulties which await success. Count Rexelaer, on his smiling entry into Paradise, found all Paradise smiling back hostility. You think his Paradise ridiculous! That is, because it is not yours. But in that case, once more, put down this book. You cannot understand it.

"All the world is against me," said Count Rexelaer bitterly. He was not exaggerating. He knew no other world than his little own. Nor does any of us, talk how we will. And if his world looks very small to you, that is, perhaps, because you stand so far below it.

From his youth upwards he had laid himself out to "serve his King," set aside for that service as much as was ever Levite in a worthier temple, and in the due perfection of that service he had found his glory and crown—coronet—of rejoicing. His father, a nobleman of William the First's easy creation (1832: Hilarius, therefore, had not been born in the purple), had struggled and schemed and fought himself into the front rank only to fall out of it again into the background of discontent through some caprice of a monarch's disfavour. There had been several children and a small fortune. Hilarius, the eldest, had behaved admirably, as soon as he was old enough to understand. Excellent financier that he was, he had avoided the common fallacy that all expenditure must necessarily be regulated by actual assets, and had shown the good sense to keep up his position, like a European state, by borrowing money which a subsequent combination must pay. It would have been fatal, as he said, to "drop out," a mistake which so many have committed under the influence of temporary misfortune. "We are too recent to recede," he told his parents when they complained of his bills. "If people are saying that we are poor, mamma, you should order in a lot of fine new clothes." The old lady would certainly have liked to do so—for the sake of the fine new clothes—but she lacked her son's pluck. Her father had been a draper; she had bourgeois ideas of honesty.

It must be admitted, on the other hand, that Hilarius never wasted a penny on himself. What he

spent he spent for his object. And he systematized both his expenditure and his debts.

When he left the University, where he had lived "correctly," Hilarius had obtained a small post in the diplomatic service—it was convenient to him, for various reasons, to remove himself from his surroundings at the Hague. He did his work well for a great many years, which means that he did nothing, decently, and with the necessary self-respect; in the meantime his brother married at home, fairly well, and his sister settled down into respectable old-maidism, and his mother (who had been a draper's daughter) died, and things began to look brighter for the family. Then Count Hilarius's reward came at last. It was not a First Prize, and he felt rather inclined to cavil at its second-rateness; still it was better than the empty Certificate of Merit, with which he had been hitherto obliged to content his meritorious self. He was attached to the Dutch Legation at Rio—no more—he was getting on for five and thirty already, and his light hair was beginning to thin at the top, when little Rita de Cachenard—Margot Magot, as she was called in the French colony—old Croesus Cachenard's niece and presumable heiress, fell frantically in love with him. She was sixteen, and very handsome, not an easy character to read, for, although she was naturally an object of interest, opinion remained divided about, not her charms (they were indisputable), but her virtues. According to some she was passionate but pure; according to others she was cold, and cool, as marble. She wrote verses to the object of her adoration, and blushed after having played them into his hands.

There seems no great harm in that. She was sixteen, and her eyes were large and black. Perhaps her soul was as large, though not as black, as they. She wanted to marry him; that was all. She had his willing consent, but perhaps she would have tried to do it without.

Her uncle was delighted that his little Margot should be a Countess. He was a fat old Frenchman and a republican. It is perfectly impossible to set down here in what manner he had amassed his very considerable fortune. Suffice it to say that the blackest brand of blackguardism was indelibly stamped upon every loathsome ducat which the young Countess Rexelaer poured into the hollow exchequer of the noble Dutch family. She poured in a good many. And yet more followed when, shortly after, the old rascal obligingly retired from the scene of his compromising successes. But he left his niece just one half of that whole she had expected; the other half he squandered and scattered among a lot of obscure individuals whom nobody had ever heard of before. Fortunately their name was in no case de Cachenard. Nor, for the matter of that, was the old man's; the disagreeable people who remember what they ought to have forgotten, could have given you an earlier and less elegant version. As for the "de," the "merchant," good patriot and republican though he was, had been obliged to forfeit his nationality and pay down no less than twenty pounds to obtain it.

Count van Rexelaer returned to Holland with his wife and her money-bags, and her tropical animals, habits, plants and waiting-woman. He made a point of remembering the money-bags—conscientiously—and

they got on very well together. He also made a point of reminding his relations of these same money-bags, and the relations made a point of reminding everybody else and of doubling, in conversation, the number, size and weight of said money-bags. The subject was thus treated with mutual goodwill, and the family behaved admirably. Mevrouw van Rexelaer-Borck, Hilarius's brother's wife, smiled sweetly when one of "the black thing's" birds went messing over her new silk dress. But then, they were so intensely relieved to find that the new member of the family was "not actually black, you know, though we called her so in fun; she is dark, and really quite handsome. Like a Spaniard." This much Mevrouw Rexelaer confided to her mother, the old Baroness Borck, a connection of the lord of Rollingen. To her intimate friends she said: "My brother-in-law's young wife comes of a noble French family, 'de Cachenard.' He met her in diplomatic circles at Petropolis. Our *only* objection would be the great difference of age (he is double hers) but, after all, that is their look-out. She is a most charming thing. Just a little—how shall I call it?—exotic. Her parents have kept her out there too long, perhaps, as a queen among slaves, you know. Like the children of Steelenaar, our own Indian Governor-General."

"Was the father French minister there?" asked a friend.

"Yes—no," replied Mevrouw van Rexelaer quickly, remembering, at the last moment, the inconvenience of printed lists. "Not minister, you know. But second-best. What is it they call it? A Councillor of the Embassy, I believe."

"Ah yes. Like the Comte de Hautlieu."

"Exactly so," rejoined Mevrouw van Rexelaer, "like the Comte de Hautlieu."

In the meantime no one took the trouble to inquire what were the sentiments of the poor girl herself. The creature was now Countess van Rexelaer. What more could she want?

But, if the truth must be told, the creature had actually had the impudence to want more. She had wanted love—stormy, passionate adoration of the "kill-your-neighbour-and-kiss-your-neighbour's-wife" kind. Something grand, terrific, imposing—love with a capital L. Not affection; poor thing! she knew nothing of affection. That is a plant which must be trained in the home-garden, while love springs up in the wastes. Father she had never known; her mother she had lost at the age of five, which was a misfortune, the mother, with all her vagaries, having been born and bred a gentlewoman. Margherita had grown up at hap-hazard, in a lazy, sunlit mansion among a crew of obsequious, villainous slaves and mongrels who pandered to her early faults, lest their own vices should be checked. She had been taught nothing, except French and Portuguese—and dancing and riding and fencing, and playing out of tune on the guitar. Even these accomplishments she had chiefly taught herself. She could fence splendidly, and that was about all.

It is to be appreciated in her, then, that she read such books as she could lay hold of—trashy novels. And one day, utterly bored by the emptiness of her existence, she had demanded a "professor of French literature." Old Cachenard, who held that woman's



only mission was to be fair, fond, foolish and, possibly, foul—there are many such men: God forgive them!—had vainly tried to dissuade his niece. Margherita liked her uncle (in all justice to her it must be confessed that she had no inkling till after his death, how he had gotten his money), but she hated him with a fierce hate when he contradicted her, which he very rarely did. A Frenchman was procured who read Musset with her—"Rolla"—and Victor Hugo—"Le Roi s'amuse," and she felt that she loved literature and took to devouring more novels, with a preference for the days of chivalry, and she wanted a knight to lift up her glove and kiss it (she had very small hands) and make noble speeches to her, beautiful, sentimental speeches—not crack disgusting jokes, like uncle Cachenard.

So when she was sixteen years old, she fell head over ears in love with Count van Rexelaer. He was a noble of exalted rank, a descendant of a long line of Knights and Crusaders, a son of Kings. His very name declared it. "Rex Hilarius—she called it Rex Ilario—he had told her about it (he was rather fond of telling); this King Hilarius, his great-grandfather, had ruled over a mighty people long before South America existed! He was greater than the Emperor. He was stately and splendid (*i.e.* tight-buttoned and thin); and his bearing was noble and knightly (*i.e.* he bowed very low, when he met her). She loved him, immensely, like an ocean. She would have liked him to die for her, but not the other way, please. And she threw herself at his feet, and he picked her up, very politely, and they were married. And not only had he no

desire to die for her, but he was not even anxious to live for her, nor with her, more than necessary, after a time.

When the Countess realized that one cannot always have what one wants—at least, not in our northern hemisphere—she first had a bad time of it, violently bad but brief, and then she felt fairly comfortable. She made up her mind to want a lot more things, and to get them, so, resigning the unattainable, she cultivated her caprices. She fortunately took a liking to her little boy, who was handsome. Physically there were seventeen years between them; psychically less. And she interested herself, from a lazy distance, in her husband's climb to that starry canopy which shone forth as his blue and vaulted heaven. Her position, unfortunately, debarred her from the poetic greatness she had been born to. "Ah, what an artist was lost!" But she cheered her solitude with song, while waiting for her husband to make a *grande dame* of her. It was very cold and bleak in Holland. But she had made up her mind to be a *grande dame*. *Mevrouw van Rexelaer-Borck* kissed her.

And her husband worked for two. He was a quiet *faber suæ fortunæ*, whose weak point was want of nerve at a crisis, and whose strong point was want of feeling. He plodded up slowly, but with an indomitable resolve never to slide back. It was hard work for him at first. He was not a favourite, his father's disgrace still clung about the family; he had none of those stilts and stays which are such a help in climbing. His sister-in-law, *Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck*, however, was a host in herself. She had brought excellent connections into the

family, almost a costlier treasure than gold. And she had managed, by one of her wonderful strokes of luck, to acquire for her husband an extra territorial title attached to a few acres of heath, dirt-cheap. Frederik van Rexelaer was Rexelaer van Altena. Hilarius—the head of the family, and, as such, the Count—was all the more anxious to be Rexelaer of something.

Gradually he prospered. His great policy was never to feel kicked. And by dint of this he sidled past better people and even pushed in front of more powerful ones. The High and Mighty began to remember that his father had been one of them; for years they had only remembered to forget. He was admitted into the Royal Household before he was fifty. There was not a part of his body which was not blue from ill-treatment, there was not a corner of his soul which was not black with lying and licking—uncharitableness, unmanliness, and uncleanness,—but he was a Great Man at last. Of course he was an exception; it is said these are apt to prove the rule.

During three bright weeks he had borne his new-culled honours, as a maiden bears her betrothal-wreath. Bright, truly, but with flashes of lightning, amid the distant roll of thunder. And often it wants a little climbing to realize the unclimbed heights above.

He paced his study-floor with gloomy eye-brows. It was almost a relief when a servant knocked, and brought the news that a man was waiting to see him.

“What sort of a man?”

“A common man,” replied the well-drilled domestic, with thankful consciousness that he was not as one of these.

Count Rexelaer walked out into the hall.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply.

The individual thus addressed seemed to cower away into the very ground. "I am a poor man," he said. "A humble man, Heer Count. Have pity on a father of four little children. I have been turned away from the service of the palace. I was clerk there, for twenty years I have kept the kitchen accounts. I earned nine florins a week. It isn't much, but it was always something. And I have always been honest, Highborn Heer Count. I have——"

"I remember," interrupted Count Rexelaer impatiently. "You were discharged a fortnight ago. I forget why."

"There was a story, Highborn Heer, about a kitchen-maid. There was not a word of truth in it, I swear before God in Heaven!"—he lifted a lean hand on high—he was a worn-looking creature, with a big nose, the only big thing about him, and bright fever-fed eyes.

"And what was the girl's name?" queried Count Rexelaer, staring at the ceiling.

"Dora Droste, Highly Nobly Born Heer Count."

"Of course," said the Count, still staring aloft. "I remember all about it perfectly." He brought his eyes down to the level of the man's face. "How dare you come here?" he said furiously. "You were turned away and you richly deserved it. We shall soon teach you, and such as you, what to expect."

"But I swear I am innocent," replied the man in earnest tones. "A father of four children, Heer Count."

"Just so. A father of four children."

"I was teaching her to read, in my free time, most noble Heer Count. She had begged me to teach her to read."

Count Rexelaer smiled. "I remember all about the case," he said. "You may feel thankful you were not prosecuted. Get out of the house this moment. Jan, show this person out."

"Is that final?" asked the fellow.

"Absolutely final." Count Rexelaer retreated to his study-door.

But the man intercepted him. "Count Rexelaer," he said, almost in a whisper, "you're playing a bold game. It won't do."

The Count drew back. "You are mad," he said. "Jan!"

"Unhand me," cried the fellow, bursting out violently. "No one dare to touch me! You—you! it is villains like you who make socialists, revolutionists, murderers! Oh you blackguard! But I swear that as sure as my name is Wouter Wonnema——"

Count Rexelaer closed his study door.

"Here, get out of this!" said the man-servant. "What do you mean by pitching into Master like that? If he were to give me notice to-morrow, I should simply grin and go."

The other looked as if he were about to launch into a long explanation; then he thought better of it, and rapidly stumbled downstairs, cursing and threatening.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A WINDOW OPENS.

REINOUT, turning the far corner of the quiet street on his homeward way from a lonely walk, was astonished to perceive an individual stationed opposite the house and gesticulating at its smooth front of many panes. The man stood out solitary against one of the long line of trees, melancholy canal-trees, in little rounds among the stones, fresh from a German toy-box. His appearance was needy, but not untidy. His figure much shrunk, yet nowise abject in its indigence.

Reinout, as has been said already, knew nothing of the actual world. He understood that the poor were part of the divinely ordered plan, created to give the rich an opportunity of exercising the virtues, especially of charity towards their brethren and of gratitude towards God. And had he been told that the poor lacked bread—which he was not—he might easily have added his name to the list of those favoured ones who are credited with having answered: "Then why don't they buy cakes?"

There could be no mistaking the strange man's meaning. He shook his fist menacingly with fierce glances and mutterings, and then, after a final thrust of his lean arm, he turned and crept in the direction from which Reinout was coming.

As soon as they were close together: "Why did you do that?" asked Reinout, reproducing the other's threat.

The man started and stared. "Because a villain lives there," he answered sullenly, "if it's any satisfaction to you to know," and he sought to continue his way.

But Reinout interposed, with flushed cheek and trembling lip. He had all his mother's impetuousness and much of his father's caution. He had the former's strength of passion, and none of the latter's nervousness. In his indignation he was going to burst out: "But that's my father!" when curiosity checked the words.

"Why a villain?" he questioned, a trifle imperiously. Wonnema stopped again. No one could look closely at Reinout and not recognize the Jonker's social status. "All rich men are villains," replied Wonnema evasively. Prudence fortunately kept him from particularising the Count's offences to the first boy that questioned him.

"But why are rich men villains?" persisted Reinout, greatly relieved, meanwhile, to find the charge so much extended.

"Why? Because they're born to 't. Because they suck it in with their mother's milk. Because God has given them the right, they think. Because a rich man's happiness is built up of a thousand poor men's sufferings. That's why."

Only the last "because" conveyed a definite meaning to the questioner. It struck straight, with all its newness. Surely things were the other way round.

"That's why," continued the strange man, warming

to his subject. "Because the rich can do no wrong, and if they *have* done wrong the poor must suffer for it. Here am I starving, because my innocence must cloak a rich man's guilt. Go your ways, boy, you'll be a villain some day, if you aren't one already. You're born to it." He passed into the road and walked a few paces farther. Then he turned for a final easement of his overburdened heart. "And yon's the biggest villain of all," he said, once more lifting a thin finger of scorn in the direction of the orange-plaster wall.

"Hold your tongue," cried Reinout boldly. "My father lives in that house." But Wonnema had already resumed his trudge. The boy stood hesitating. Of the other's last speech he had again understood one sentence only, which reached his heart. "Here am I starving." The man was of course a beggar. What other connection could there be between rich and poor? He had been turned off at the door and was angry. People *were* turned off, as Reinout knew, for the Count disapproved of almsgiving. The boy had a whole florin in his pocket, half the month's pocket-money. "Starving!" He ran after the retreating figure. "Here, poor man!" he said. And to his utter amazement the beggar struck the coin to the ground. "My children are famished," said Wonnema thickly, trembling with emotion. "I would rather see them dead than take home one penny of yours!" The florin lay glittering in the mud.

Reinout retreated in dismay. He did not look round again, from a delicate instinct that the other was still staring hungrily at the silver-piece. But Wonnema let it lie.

The boy crept into the house, all his heart and



head in confusion. For the first time in his life he had come into contact with the Spirit of Protest against things that are. He knew of course of the existence of wickedness and sorrow—vaguely—these were unavoidable and to be endured. He knew that wickedness incorporate—mad ambition—had slain blessed saints and martyrs such as Louis the Sixteenth. For there had always been thieves and murderers, big and small. But an honest, if mistaken, cry against Evil in High Places, an arraignment of divinely-instituted Order before the bar of God Himself, of this he could make nothing. Irresistibly he felt that the poor wretch had been sincere. "A rich man's happiness is built up of a thousand poor men's sorrows." "Some day you will be a villain; you are born to it." He sat down on a bench in the hall to think it out. And, his eye falling on some letters in the letter-box, he carried these in to his father, as was his custom, and then went back to his seat. It was no use asking Papa about the poor. Papa felt no interest in the subject. And he differed from M. de Souza. "You should never give to beggars," he had often said. "It encourages them to ask for more."

Reinout lay back on the open bench and closed his eyes. That refusal of money. What did it signify? There was no room for it in the whole little system of his calm existence. And the more he thought of it the more bewildered he grew.

While he still lingered there, he heard his father calling his name in the library, in a strange, "strangled" voice. As he started up, the door flew open, and the Count came rushing out, his face distorted with excitement. "Reinout," he stammered, "Reinout!" and catch-

ing the boy to his breast he covered him with kisses, laughing and sobbing by turns. Reinout kept quite still; a horrible fear traversed his brain that his father had become insane; he set his teeth tight.

"My boy, my boy," said the Count at last more calmly, holding his son at arms' length and looking into his eyes. "Imagine, what wonder! What triumph! God has given us Deynum. In the most wonderful of all manners, it is ours!"

"Ours?" repeated the lad, bewildered.

"Ours, yes, ours. Mine, yours. Ever afterwards. Yours. Yours, some day when your poor father has been laid to rest. Yours, Reinout, Count Rexelaer van Deynum!" He once more drew his heir towards him, and kissed him, solemnly this time, between the eyes. "And now I must go tell your mother," he said, and turned to the staircase. "Gracious Heaven," he thought to himself, as he mounted it with dancing step, "how queerly things work round!" Yet, he was not one of those who feel that Heaven is gracious, even when things work round—queerly.

Reinout, left to himself, repeated: "God has given us Deynum." More money, then. More grandeur. Did that mean more "villainy"? Nonsense. The man was crazy. God has given us Deynum. What is "God" to Reinout? An image set up at very rare intervals, special "points de vue," along the road of life. It is a double-visaged image, like Janus. One face has angry eyebrows: Fate; the other smiling glances: Luck.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

## MISS PIGGIE.

ALTERNATELY slapping and stroking her lap-dogs, Florizel and Amanda (abbreviations by Reinout, regardless of inverted gender, Flora and Ami), Madame van Rexelaer lay humming her second stanza, which, translated into English, would have run somewhat as follows:

“Then let me sleep the sleep of death,  
And bear me where my fathers are.  
My dying sob was the final breath,  
Of the noble house of Cachenard.”

She was purring over this poetical effusion when the Count suddenly burst in upon her.

“Prepare yourself,” he said, “for the most extraordinary, the most incredible good news!”

“O Rex,” she exclaimed, flushing with pleasure. “You don’t mean to say I’m invited to stay at the Palace of Loo?”

“Rex,” was the name she had given him in the earliest dawn of her enthusiasm. O Richard! O Hilaire! O mon Roy! She hardly ever made use of it now, but the moment was one of ecstatic abandonment; visions floated before her of delicious new dresses, three a day, and the intimate intercourse of an august

home-circle for half a week, so different from the tumult of an omnium gatherum where you made your bow in the crowd and sank back like a wave on the sea. She screamed aloud with expectation.

"No, no, that another time!" said the Count. "How can you talk such nonsense, when you know the Court is here? Just listen to me, and put down those dogs for a minute."

"I thought it was an invitation," pouted the lady, "I don't care if it isn't an invitation. I don't want anything else."

"It appears," the Count continued, without taking any notice of the last remarks, "that your mother had connections of whom you never knew anything—very respectable relations, to say the least."

"My mother's name was Dupuys," replied the daughter of the noble house of Cachenard, removing her face from behind Florizel, whither she had retreated in her sulkiness. "It doesn't sound a very aristocratic name. My uncle once told me that she had come from the north of France. He never said anything about her relations."

Count Hilarius had always carefully avoided glancing down into the depths from whence his wife had ascended to his side. Not to know is the safest way of lying. It was enough to live in constant recollection of the uncle's career, without discovering what the parents had done. He had grumbled at the dishonour and he had also grumbled, the price being so heavy, that his wife had not brought him more at the price. Fortunately Rio was far; and the parents were still farther.

"I cannot make it out very clearly as yet," he now said, "but, as far as I can see, your mother was a very different person from what she pretended to be. The Belgian lawyer who writes presumes that I am acquainted with her antecedents and is therefore far from explicit. But it seems that she was neither more nor less than a Demoiselle de la Jolais-Farjolle, of the Belgian house of la Jolais de Saint-Leu. She seems to have run away with a—a—her husband." He stopped, and eyed his wife curiously.

"And what is that, la Jolais?" asked the Countess.

"It is one of the greatest families in Europe," replied the Count drily. "The head of the house is the Marquis de la Jolais-Farjolle."

Mademoiselle de Cachenard clapped her hands. "How delightful!" she cried with a bright little laugh. "How pretty! A Marquis! It is more than a Count. What a good thing I did not know when I married you, that my mother had been a Marchioness, Hilarius. I might not have been satisfied with a Count, after that."

"Your mother was not a Marchioness," answered Rexelaer irritably, "no more than your uncle Cachenard. Whatever she was, she seems to have had the good taste after her—adventure, to sink all her past down a well, henceforth to be known as Dupuys. But, now, as to results."

"No, no, you are jealous! How charming it sounds! De Cachenard, née de la Jolais-Guignol. Much nicer than Rexelaer. I wish I had known!" And she hugged Florizel to her face till he squeaked.

"De Farce rare, née de la jolie guinguette," cried

the son of all the Rexelaers, exasperated by these taunts. "Your mother was a gentlewoman—more shame to her!—and she ran away with a groom out of her brother's stables, and his name was Cochonnard!"

"What?" shrieked the Creole, dropping Florizel with a thud on the floor. "It isn't true. Oh you horrid vulgar man to come and tell such stories! And she burst into a tempest of screeches and (audible) wishes she was dead.

"Allons, allons, how can you behave so childish!" interposed the Count, somewhat disturbed by this exceptional ebullition of feeling. "You have known all along how your uncle got his 'de,' and that you were not even legally entitled to use it."

"I was my uncle's heiress," wailed Margherita, "and I don't care. I won't be called Cochonnette."

"You are called at present," said her husband soothingly, "the Countess Van Rexelaer."

"I don't care," she interrupted him with a fresh burst of tears. "I wo-wo-won't be called Miss Piggie—Miss Piggie, indeed! I wo-wo-won't."

"But for goodness sake, listen to reason. There is the bright side yet to come, and it is almost incredibly fortunate. The Marquis de la Jolais, your mother's half-brother, is dead. He died, intestate, about a fortnight ago, and if, as they imagine, you are his only near relation, all his private property will come to you."

"I don't care," said Margherita, opening her eyes, nevertheless.

"Nonsense. They have been telegraphing to Rio,

and the answer has come that they must apply to me. As indeed they must. There is quite a distant cousin, they tell me, who succeeds to the Belgian estate by a contract independent of wills, but you, being the niece, are the heiress who comes into the rest."

"All the other money was mine too," said Margherita.

She stung him. "Yes," he said, "it was, Mademoiselle Cochonnard."

Then Margherita screamed once more and fainted dead away.

Years ago, when this used to happen, the Count would pull down the bell-rope. Now he walked out of the room.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

## SPLENDIDE MENDAX.

A DAY or two later, further advices having been received meanwhile, the great news had obtained sufficient consistency to allow of its being communicated to the Rexelaers-Borck.

The facts as to Margherita's mother were briefly these. The Marquis de la Jolais,—the Marquis J'ose—himself his mother's only child, had had a step-sister many years younger than he, the late darling of the whole family. He had been as a father to her during many years, and just as he had arranged that she should be most desirably married to (not with) an old friend of his own, she had eloped with a stable-boy. The head of the house had immediately erased her name from its annals, and, having been apprised later on that she was living at Lyons with her spendthrift husband in absolute destitution, he paid her over the sum of ten thousand francs, on consideration of her sacredly binding herself to sink all her antecedents and to assume henceforth the name of Dupuys. The bargain was faithfully kept. The man Cochonnard died early from drink; his broken-hearted wife did not long survive him, and their little daughter Margaret was left with her rich bachelor-uncle. The Marquis



remained unaware of all particulars. He had forbidden his lawyers to communicate with him on the subject, and he had caused it to be generally understood that his half-sister had died without a child. Nevertheless, one of those rumours that always come knocking at barricaded ears had vaguely informed him of some facts concerning the Cochonnards and their money-making. He had loved his sister as much as he was capable of loving anything; a hundred times he wished she had died in her bloom.

Once his eye had fallen on an announcement in the Paris *Figaro* of the marriage of a Count Rexelaer, of whom he knew nothing but the name, with a Mademoiselle Rita de Cachenard, of whom he knew nothing at all. He had glided on to the next paragraph. But a few weeks later he received a short letter from the old uncle. In the joy of his heart Cochonnard had thought the moment was come to reconcile his little Margot with her mother's noble relation. That gentleman tore up the letter, furious at having his uncertainty thus rudely broken into. As for the improvement in the young lady's original patronymic, it filled him with unfathomable contempt.

Nevertheless, he now knew what he knew. His sister had a daughter living, and that daughter was a Countess Rexelaer. Of the Rexelaers of Deynum. He was not as well up in Dutch families as the Baron was in Belgian. But even the Baron had known nothing of Mademoiselle de la Jolais except that she had run away, long ago, with some footman, and had died shortly afterwards, in Paris, he believed. The Marquis was not sorry to think the child should have done well.

But he washed his hands—literally, laboriously—after having torn up the old man's letter.

One summer he had gone to spend a week with some friends at their seat near Blankenberghe, and fickle, foolish Fortune had cast the child Reinout straight across his path. He had fled from the association that night with both hands to his ears. But the memory clung to his dried-up old heart. He liked the look of the boy. He liked his manner. He had liked, above all, that bold dash into danger. The Marquis J'ose knew good blood when he saw it.

And on that terrible night of his flight from Amsterdam, the word "Deynum," as it crashed through the carriage-window, had struck comfort to his soul, in the midst of its agony. "This is nothing," the guard had cried, "this is Deynum." Truly, it was nothing to him; he had willed that it should be nothing, but it was the only name which, at that hour of supremest loneliness, had conveyed to the wretched sufferer a remote idea of relationship. He knew nothing more of the Rexelaers than that they had their home at Deynum. He could travel no farther. The place fascinated him. He would keep up, all the more strictly, the incognito he had already assumed. He would look out for himself. Perhaps—who knows?—he would find ultimate pleasure in this daughter of his race. He would see the boy again. He was dying. Death strangely alters our perspectives.

He remained, therefore, a day or two at the village-inn, whence he would in no case have been anxious to depart, and tried to feel his way. He soon perceived that there were complications which his ignorance was

unable to unravel. He was too proud to write off now, for information, to his lawyers at Brussels. These were the wrong Rexelaers. Of course they were related. There were jealousies, evidently, and bickerings. The Marquis was too much occupied with himself to take any great interest in these. Then came the incident of the house. He wanted the lonely castle, with all a rich man's sudden, irresistible want. And if later on it should, in the course of life's accidents, become young Reinout's property, well, that was no inducement, but it was certainly no objection, to buying it. As for the clause about never "letting or selling to Count Hilarius van Rexelaer" he could easily subscribe to that. Count Hilarius would either inherit the property through his wife or never possess it at all. But the sick man had not as yet settled these things in his mind; perhaps, later on, he would make a will. He was bitterly irritated at the failure to discover his niece in the hour of need. Yet he wanted to die unknown. He wanted to be nursed. He wanted both extremes. He wanted neither. And in the midst of his uncertainty the catastrophe spread sudden silence over all.

Reinout went up to his room with the wonderful discovery that the mysterious old gentleman of his long boy fancies had now developed into a blood-relation, a fairy god-father, a great giver of gifts. The splendour of a powerful position, large landed proprietorship with all its responsibilities and advantages, the sudden uplifting into a "great family," this had come to his mother, and through his mother, to himself, direct from

the dead hand of his secret friend. He understood the importance of the inheritance as few boys of his age could have done. Yet it was not so much an uplifting as a restoration. He knew all about the fief of Hohenthal-Sonnenborn, and the Countship of the Holy Roman Empire, and "I will make you Baron Butterworth." The hero of the latter story he revered as the founder of "our branch." At last, then, after the lapse of three centuries, a Count Rexelaer would again ascend the ancestral throne. He understood all that. You cannot help knowing thoroughly what your father tells you at least once a month."

He locked himself into his room with "Prince." He could not have told you why he liked to lock himself in, although nobody ever disturbed him. It was a fancy, a craving of the lonely child for absolute loneliness. Next door was the schoolroom, bare and tiresome; this was his own sanctum, dull and dark like the rest of the house, but bright to him with all a boy's accumulated treasure. He had a fine collection of seals, and a smaller one of postage stamps (neglected), and he was now busy in getting together, at the Chevalier's suggestion and under his superintendence, a set of engravings of "distinguished" personages, native and foreign. Some good swords and rapiers hung against the wall, a present from his father; in one corner stood a turning-lathe, in another a complete suit of armour from a children's ball (William van Rexelaer, first Count Hohenfels) and an outgrown toy uniform of a Prussian Hussar, for in earlier days Reinout had loved to dress up. The place of honour, however, was occupied by a small glass cabinet, in

which were carefully arranged a variety of old-fashioned gloves and mittens, half a dozen centuries of hand-covering, big and little, silken, leathern, or velvet, embroidered, bejewelled and laced. The Chevalier's life-long hobby, gloves of celebrated women—he had spent on the hands what the hearts had left him)—solemnly made over to his darling pupil on the latter's twelfth birthday, "the termination of childhood." "Collectionnez, mon enfant," said Monsieur de Souza. "It is good; it supplies a vocation. When next we are in Paris I will take you to see the fans of the Vicomtesse de Rovilly. They are worth several hundred thousand francs and she shows them to no one, but she and I are friends of the days gone by. That is the distinction of the collectionneur comme il faut. He does not show his collections." Nature was represented by a pair of gorgeous stuffed birds from Brazil, all glitter, and pricked-up-ness, and pride.

Reinout threw himself down on a magnificent tiger-skin, the present of an Indian Prince to Margherita, but neglected now and a little moth-eaten in places. The great black retriever fell over his young master, and they curled themselves into each other, warm and soft. Two things were troubling Reinout's thoughts, in spite of his eager desire to rejoice in his father's triumph: the lean finger of earnest protest upraised against the "villainy" of Greatness, and the strange Marquis's last, sad words: "Try to do your duty. I have not."

"I will," said Reinout, sitting up, with his arm round the dog's neck. "If only one always had somebody to tell one exactly what was right, it would be

so easy. Why isn't there? I don't suppose anybody wants, purposely, to do anything wrong. Of course there's Monsieur de Souza. He always used to know, I think, but perhaps he doesn't always. I don't think he'd quite understand what this beggar-man meant, he knows so little about poor people. 'A gentilhomme devoir fait loi. That means that to do your duty's always right. At any rate, it's always right to choose the disagreeable and be kind.' And then he began to ponder the approaching St. Nicholas festivities and the presents he was going to buy for his cousins, the Rexelaers-Borck, especially for Topsy, his twelve-year-old favourite and playmate. He always received ten florins extra to purchase these presents with. He still hesitated, for Topsy, between a canary and a card-case (!). True, that was a subject on which he could ask his mother's advice. There were some subjects, you see, on which he could ask his mother's advice. He got up, and wandered downstairs to find her, the dog at his heels. Prince was not permitted to enter the winter-garden, because of his sweeping tail. He knew it, and the prohibition was a very sore point with him on account of Ami's and Flora's insolent manner of yapping against the glass-doors. He sneaked in to-day unperceived, and then turned with loud-voiced protest at Reinout's command to retire, backing and barking and bounding till, in another moment, he had upset a couple of pots by the entry. Margherita came into view from behind a great stand of chrysanthemums. Her eyes were still sulky; she looked down at the snapped stems with their helpless pink blossoms. They were her dear Brazilian lilies, just come back from the

florist who had reared the seeds for her at much trouble and expense.

She did not say a word, but her face grew suddenly ugly, and she went back for a little whip which she kept to rule her own pets.

Reinout had seen his mother beat Prince once before, till she drew blood. He trembled from head to foot. "Mamma," he cried, "it wasn't Prince's fault, it was me. I brought him in and I knocked him up against the flower-pots."

She hesitated, with uplifted whip. One moment he thought she was going to strike him; then she said, in a voice as ugly as her face, "Very well, René; your St. Nicholas money can pay for new ones," and turned her back on the boy and the cowed creature at his feet.

Reinout silently got his copy-books and went up to Monsieur de Souza. He felt that he had done his duty by his defenceless friend, whose entrance he should have forestalled.

His tutor and he were busy with Italy, which was by no means a united kingdom yet in those days, "And now repeat to me, René," said Monsieur de Souza, "what I told you yesterday about Naples. How did there come to be a Bourbon reigning at Naples? Go on." And Reinout began. "You are forgetting about the Casa Crocida's," interrupted the old gentleman presently. "I am coming to that, Monsieur," replied Reinout, colouring. "But the King, seeing the battle was hopelessly lost, turned and fled down a narrow ravine. After a long ride he reached the lonely house of a peasant by some cross-roads, and the

peasant, recognising him, gave him a fresh horse. And the King said: 'Swear that you do not betray me,' and the old peasant swore on the cross of the King's sword. But just when the King was gone, flying to the left, a troop of the enemy rode up and they asked which way the King had passed. And the peasant said, 'To the right,' but they did not believe him, and they made him swear on the cross again, and he told them that he hated the King because he had taken his only son for a soldier, and then he saw that the enemy had got his son with them as a prisoner! And the captain of the enemy said: 'We will turn to the right'—for they had to choose, you see, by the old peasant's cottage—'and if the King is not caught to-night, we shall slay your son.' And the peasant said: 'The King is gone to the right.'

"And when the war was over the King sent for the old man and made him a baron. And the son, who had escaped, became a great general. That was in the thirteenth century"—"Fifteenth," corrected M. de Souza—"and the King gave them as a motto 'Splendide Mendax,' and the present head of the house is Prince Paul Casa Crocida, who was ambassador at Paris under Louis Philippe, and arranged the treaty of Maisons-Douillette, and whose wife is a Pamphigliosi and an aunt of the Italian minister here."

Presently the Count came in. He liked to think he remained in touch with his son's education. "Well, my dear Chevalier," he said beamingly, "I hope we shall be able to move to Deynum in time for Christmas. We can hardly be ready as early as St. Nicholas (5th Dec.), but we must have a regular Christmastide with all my



brother's family. They are so English, you know. The air is dry up at Deynum. It will do your rheumatics good."

"It will do good then unto the good and to the evil," said the old Chevalier, smiling. "Like the good God Himself."

"And you, René," continued the Count, turning to his staring son, "you must keep your presents till Christmas. We shall have a splendid time."

"There will be no presents," said Reinout, a little sullenly.

"Nonsense. Why not?"

"Mamma has taken away my money," replied the son of the house, with his elbows on the table.

"Have you been misbehaving? Oh, never mind. We can't have the whole thing spoiled just now. I'll let you have an extra gold piece for the sake of Deynum." And Count Hilarius fingered the money in his waistcoat-pocket. As a rule he, with his pecuniary preciseness, was a complete stranger to "tips."

Reinout did not move from his ungraceful pose.

"I'd rather not, Papa," he said, in his young pride of martyrdom. "Mamma wouldn't like it."

"Nonsense. Catch!"

And Reinout, not being a prig, caught.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

## LOW LIFE, FOR A CHANGE.

A FEW evenings before the memorable Christmas-tide of that memorable year, a group of heavy-browed peasants sat solemnly smoking their pipes round the stove in the taproom at Deynum. The stove glowed red-hot in the centre, the room was ill-lighted and stuffy, amid its perfumes of gin and paraffin, and its slow-wreathing clouds of smoke. Could you have pierced beyond the lowering beams of the ceiling, you would have found in the chamber above a dark stain hid away under the square of carpet. They had scrubbed the boards repeatedly, but the stain remained.

The "memorable" year 18—. Surely, in all human language, there is no more ridiculous word than "memorable," the bellows with which we try to rekindle our little dead sparks. To the lookers-on at Deynum the year was memorable, because it brought events which interested and amused them, "pained" them also, but even pain, in a great catastrophe, is a form of amusement to the lookers-on. To you, who live in the centre of the Universe, my epithet looks extravagantly oversized, but to you the Christmas of that year is memorable because of Tenorelli's magnificent début at the Scricci, or because the festivities of the season brought

your first attack of gout in their train. Or perhaps it is memorable to all the hundred millions of this rolling world of Koopstad, because of that great victory which "changed the course of history." So be it. It is memorable to Tante Suze, because peat was a halfpenny cheaper that winter than it has ever been before or since.

The peasants of our poor little village sat round the fire on that winter's evening, and smoked. But they always sat there, of winter evenings, and they always smoked. They sat motionless, in great, black hulking lumps, with their caps drawn over their eyelids, and their eyelids sunk over their immovable cheeks, enshrouded in lazy mists from each man's pendent pipe. And mine host tried to make them talk, as in duty bound, while he filled their little glasses with thick white gin, for was it not his duty to provide entertainment, and his profit to provoke thirst?

The remarkable circumstance on the particular evening here mentioned was this, that the guests talked of their own accord, and without any prompting. It were erroneous, however, to imagine a babel of conversation. In the silence of the heavily-shadowed bar-room some tight-coated, rusty creature—the only bright spot about whom was probably his vermilion face—would suddenly hazard a few slow sentences, frequently without removing the pipe which pulled down his lips. And then, after a brief pause, during which the clock against the wainscoted wall ticked with stimulating preciseness, a few solemn words of reply would ooze forth from another creature, exactly similar in features, and manner and accent, to the one who had spoken last.

And, however insignificant the opinion emitted, each speaker wore an air, in emitting it, which would have done honour to a conclave of dignitaries of the Church.

"Yes, it's true enough," said Jaap Hakkert, the butcher. "I met Fokke Meinderts myself this afternoon driving a cart-load of boxes from the station. The family are coming next week."

"What do they want cart-loads of things for?" queried a voice from behind the peat-basket. "Wasn't there mountains in the Castle already? And didn't the old Baron leave them all?"

"Everything," broke in the landlady's fat voice, "excepting the plate and the pictures and the family papers and things. Those the Baron had removed to Father Bulbius's two days after the—the accident."

There was an especially long pause this time, heavy with thought. At last Job, the landlord, remarked, as he meditatively took down a bottle of spirits: "There's nothing coming but 'personal effects,' Dievert tells me. Whatever those may be, great folks require a good deal of them, it seems. They can't be clothes only, for nobody would want such boxes of *them*."

"Much you know about it," burst in Hendrika with a scornful slap of her red hand on the bar. "Great ladies have hundreds of dresses, a couple for every day in the year!" She cast aggressive glances at her cumbersome husband from her bright, bold eyes. Evidently an old subject.

"The Baroness hadn't dozens of different dresses,"

retorted Job, on the defensive. "One always saw her in the same black silk."

"The Baroness wasn't a fine town lady."

"She was a real fine lady!" cried the landlord.

"She was the greatest lady that ever was," said a feeble old man, who sat nearest the stove.

They all spoke of her in the past. To the villager one who has definitely quitted the village is dead.

"I mind me when you never came across her but in a white robe, like an angel," the "oldest inhabitant" went on. But at this several of them cried out. They all remembered that, they said. Uncle Peter must not give himself airs. The old man subsided querulously. "I mind the Baron's grandfather," he muttered, "with a bag to his hair, and buckle-shoes." But nobody heeded him. Their loss was too recent. And besides, they had heard all his stories before.

Everyone sat staring gloomily and smoking. Presently Jaap Hakkert "screeched" his chair along the sanded floor.

"There's one thing I can't understand," he said very loud. "This old gentleman that—that *died* was a good Catholic—eh?" And he looked round fiercely, daring the whole circle to deny it. Not that he cared much, but that was his bullying way.

"He was a Catholic," replied Hendrika, "but not good. Now, his man was a pious, amiable gentleman, and so pleasant to speak to." She smirked a little, half frightened under the furious glances of her lord.

"And these people, his heirs, are nought but beggarly Protestants," Hakkert went on, ignoring the landlady. "And what I want to know is, how?"

Most of the peasants lifted up their eyelids for a moment and gazed stolidly at each other; then they dropped them again. The butcher sat up, his whole bulky body a mass of indignant interrogation. "And Rexelaers too," said one man who had not spoken before.

"It doesn't seem in nature," said the voice from behind the peat-stove. There was a general murmur of approval. The old man spat on the ground. "God forgive them; perhaps they can't help it," muttered a gentle-faced personage, who sat a little outside the circle, the village tailor.

But this sentiment did not find acceptance.

"Some people are born so," added the tailor, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Not Rexelaers," declared the butcher violently. And he struck the ashes out of his pipe on to his raw, fleshy palm.

"Well, whatever they may be," interposed the ever conciliatory landlord, "we shall have them among us in a week, and we shall see."

"And we shall hang out flags and put up a couple of triumphal arches," said the tailor. "It's a pity the season is too late for flowers."

"No arches!" burst out a young fellow, who now spoke for the first time. He spoke with great vehemence. And he came forward from a little side-table, by which he had been sprawling in the darkness, his hands in his pockets, a stumpy brown pipe between his lips—a big bright-looking young fellow, with a shock of yellow hair. The others all stared slowly round at him.

"I'd like to see the sneak would dare to hang out a bit of colour," he cried, slowly edging his way into the circle. He held up the little brown pipe in one huge brown hand, the other he clenched in a threatening lump in the pocket of his tight black breeches. "Who of you wants to rejoice at the old lord's downfall? Not I."

"Not I," said the man behind the peat-basket, and then most of the others said "Not I." "Ah, but what does the Commune do?" said the tailor. And he smiled.

The Commune, in Holland, has a Burgomaster, a couple of assessors and a village-council. The Burgomaster is almost always a man of birth and position, by preference a large landed proprietor. The Baron had been Burgomaster of Deynum; the post was vacant.

All eyes were turned—with a long, slow movement which left the heads unaltered—in the direction of a portly farmer whose rubicund full moon shone with the radiance of fifty years' prosperous butter-making. This was the Deputy Burgomaster. "We must see what Dievert says," this worthy made haste to declare. Dievert, the Baron's steward, was the other assessor, and had been, for many years, practical ruler of the Commune.

"If the village-council do anything in the way of an official welcome, they deserve to be hung," declared Thys, as he turned on one heel. "They won't," assented somebody. "No, that they won't, nor none of us," cried the landlady energetically. "Bravo, Thys; are you off to Lise up at the Chalkhouse-farm? He! He!" The landlady, like all her sex, dearly loved a

bit of love-making; other people's was always second-best. Thys was Lise's sweetheart, you remember. They were to be married in spring.

"No, they won't," affirmed Jaap Hakkert, who was a member of the Council, "not for beggars of Protestants. We don't want no d—— beggars of Protestants at Deynum."

"Hist," interrupted Job, who was another member. He looked round anxiously. For Protestants, though they do not thirst for the true religion, may still be made welcome at a Catholic bar. At Deynum the Pharisees of both sects visited the Publican's house with a beautiful readiness which would have been deemed reprehensible eighteen hundred years ago. But to-night, as it happened, the landlord's eye beheld none of these men of false faith and honest pay, such as his soul both scorned and cherished.

"No, that the Council won't," said Job, disgusted by their absence. "Damn beggars, whether masters or servants."

"Best take your masters as they're sent," said the tailor.

Thys turned threateningly by the door, already half invisible, looming terrible through the darkness. "It's my belief you're glad," he said illogically. "Boys, let's shame him. Hurrah for the old Baron! The Holy Virgin help him. Hurrah!"

Dutchmen are not easily moved to exhibit feeling. Nor did these now spring to their feet with uplifted caps. But most of them took up Thys's cry, with a clumsy grin on their faces and a doubt, at their hearts, of young Thys's foolish fuss. In those same wooden-



walled hearts, however, there was but one prayer of sympathy for the poor great ones so suddenly driven from their midst. The Dutch peasant, as a rule, thinks and feels true. The Baron had, all his life, been a good lord to his people; the Baroness a very patron Saint. The new man was a fine city gentleman, despicable for having been born in a street. And, besides, as far as they understood, he had not even paid for, but had stolen the property, which the Baron had expressly conditioned should never be his. "We will insult him," said one fellow aloud, giving voice to the general sentiment. The tailor sat gazing immovably at the red eye of the stove. Some ashes fell, and the red eye winked at him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### REINOUT II.

A LIVERY servant of Count Rexelaer's, with heavy fur collar and orange cockade, stood in lonely grandeur on the little Deynum platform, under the glimmering oil-lamp. Two carriages were waiting beyond, their lights radiant across the snow of the starry December night.

The whole family came bundling out of their compartment, in an avalanche of winter wraps, the parrot, the yelping lapdogs, a couple of attendants, a chaos of baggage, animate beings, and cold. "Oh there's John," called out Reinout. "How's my pony, John?" For he had received the promised pony from his father a couple of weeks ago.

The station-master came sidling up, with awkward curiosity, which the lord of the manor suddenly felt and resented. He hurried his wife into the foremost of the conveyances and they drove rapidly off, along the bleak country-road. "The cold is unbearable," whispered the Countess, shuddering. "Oh, Mamma, how can you say so? Look at the lovely softness of the snow," the boy's eyes were dancing with excitement. "We are going to have oceans of fun. There is a lake, and when my cousins have taught me to skate, I will teach you." "Thank you," said Margherita. "Happy child, you have forgotten!"

They drove through the village presently in the soft snow-light; all was deserted and still. The Count looked towards his wife uncomfortably. The horses pattered briskly on, past the little square with its silent church, and round into the avenue of the park. "Ah!" gasped the Count.

They came out into the clearing and saw the dark mass of the Castle rise up on the other side of the water. Suddenly the bell in the tower began to ring, a pitiful call to meals, very unlike the triumphant harmony of church-bells. The horses' hoofs went clattering over the bridge and up the courtyard. The great doors were thrown open, and a flood of light poured down across two bending figures, Strum and Dievert, on the steps. Count Hilarius gave his wife a nervous hand and led her past the Steward's unnoticed "Welcome to your noble Countships" into the hall of his fathers. The place was full of people. "Ah, the tenants, of course, and the villagers! Very kind, very kind," murmured the fine gentleman. The Steward

came hurrying up behind him: "Hurrah for my lord the Count and his lady!" A feeble shout responded in which Reinout's voice rang out above the rest. The lap-dogs sprang forward, barking irritably.

All eyes were fixed on the outlandish waiting-woman, with the parrot on her arm. And at her appearance the stupidest lout among the peasants realized, with terrible distinctness, that here were aliens indeed.

Margherita paused under the great stained-glass lamp. "This vestibule is terribly bare," she said, in French. Strum understood her and moved uncomfortably. And indeed the great panels showed only too plainly, to all but the owners of the house, where the portraits and suits of armour had been taken down. "In summer," interposed the Notary, "there are more flowers. The rest of the house is well furnished. Of course some personal—items——" The Count winced. The Countess, without heeding the speaker, had passed on into the dining-room.

"And these are all the tenants?" said Count Hilarius. He swept his hand along the crowd of staring, unemotional faces.

"As good as all, Heer Count," was the enigmatical answer.

"Ah! Well, my good people, we shall doubtless be excellent friends. This is my son, the Jonker\* Reinout." The familiar name fell like a dead weight.

Reinout, not knowing what else to do, as his father pushed him forward, held out his hand to a couple of burly old farm-people opposite. "Good evening," he said.

\* Title for unmarried sons of noblemen. Pronounced Yonker.

The motherly farm-wife seized the hand and grasped it warmly. "Good evening, little Heer," she answered, "the Saints preserve you!" A murmur of approval ran through the half-defiant ranks. Count Hilarius turned to go.

But Dievert detained him, dragging forward an unwilling personage, who had hitherto been trying to look invisible, Boterton, the loco-Burgomaster. "Now then, Boterton!" Boterton's face was purple. "The Commune bids your Nobleness welcome, Heer Count," he stuttered. "In the name of the village," he added, "and the Council." After the enunciation of which profound sentiment he lapsed into silence.

And the careless walls of Deynum looked down upon this scene also.

"Oh yes," said the Count. "Who is the Burgomaster? Eh?"

"There is none, Heer Count," replied the Notary. "Not at present."

Count Hilarius flushed. "Good-night," he said. And fled.

Somehow the whole thing reminded him of—of what? Suddenly he remembered. Of the return of the Bourbon to his capital, when the enemies of his country brought him back. It was not a bit like coming home to his own.

"Laissez," said the Countess, "I am dead with fatigue—and emotion. This, then, is the *château de mes pères*. It is handsome, but '*faut qu'on s'y habitue*.' Ugh, what a country! Had Brazil not been discovered so late, M. le Comte's ancestors might perhaps have been Brazilian!"

"The château has come true," replied the mulatto. *She* did not love this marsh of her indwelling, "but the cards had foretold, M'am Rita, that it would lie in a land of *knaves*."

The departure from the Hague had indeed been fraught with emotions. The birds, all but Rollo, the parrot, had been left behind, their doctor refusing to sanction the journey. Margherita had wandered disconsolately from cage to cage, and taken poetical leave of them. "Adieu, Fifi. Tu dois rester ici. Et moi, je vais partir. Adieu, mon Casimir." She herself would not have travelled, but for the Count's threat to receive the Rexelaers of Altena just the same, without her.

And then the terrible journey itself. At the station she had been met by a refusal to admit her poor little curled darlings into her compartment. They must be thrown into a luggage-van, plush-baskets and all, there to die! The authorities were inflexible. The Countess still more so. There had been a scene on the platform, and a crowd. Laïssa had pushed over, with impassive arm, an official who happened to interpose, and the pets had been ensconced upon the carriage cushions, and Margherita, as she lay back among her furs, had hissed "Canaille" in the station-master's face. Procès-verbal had been drawn up; the nervous, distinguished-looking gentleman had been compelled to give his name: Count Rexelaer van Deynum, a Lord of the Household!

"I will never travel with you again, Margot," Count Hilarius had declared, as the train slowly glided into motion, the spaniels, at their mistress's instigation,

barking triumph against the glass. "Had you been a man," Margherita had answered, panting, "you would have beaten that cowardly dog-torturer within an inch of his life." "And a pity of the inch," she added, "mais il faut bien respecter les convenances."

"And the Court?" suggested the little-souled Count, touching, in his little-souled anxiety, the one point where she would wince. "In these Democratic times, such a row, with its possible consequences, may cost me my place."

"I don't care," replied the Countess, caring very much.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE MESSAGE OF THE SILENCE.

THE boy, left to himself, as the crowd slowly melted away from around him, stood staring, between the marble columns, up into the darkness of the roof. He could dimly discern, emblazoned high above, the well-known lions with their shining swords. The familiar faces of the royal beasts made him feel at home immediately. He nodded to them. And then he ran to the glass front-doors, and looked out.

The landscape lay before him, clear in the tremble of its snow-smitten waiting for the moon—the white courtyard, and the dull glitter of the trees beyond. Away, where the bridge was, there must be water. He wanted to find out about the skating he had promised his cousins; in another moment he was racing through the pleasant snow-sheltered air.

Reinout had never beheld the face of nature. He retained a vague, delicious recollection of the Paradise of his infancy, glorified by Margherita's never-ending regrets. The loveliness and the sensuousness of living, as felt by every beetle and by every bud, had lapped him, body and soul; he had rioted in happiness, nothing to do but to breathe where every breath was heavy—sometimes too crushingly heavy—with enjoyment; his young existence voluptuously prostrate beneath the splendour of its own excess. That sun-sick dawn had left its flush upon his face and heart; the child of the equator would never freeze into a cool, white Dutchman; but there had been no intercourse with nature in the constant seclusion of awnings and shutters, the shrinking, the ceaseless protection from all that is pernicious in reptile, insect or flower. From these climates European children come away with the light of the sun in their eyes. That is all they remember.

He was still young when they brought him to the Hague. There was an apple-tree in the garden there. It never bore any apples, and Reinout's interest in it had always been Platonic.

But now!—oh the sudden revelation, the personal contact which lay in that one thought: this is home. The trees, the fields, the water, these were "ours," not with the sense of proprietorship, but with the power of enjoyment. Nature, henceforth, would stand ready as a playmate, and her abode, with its fathomless treasures, would be his. What matter, if at this their first embrace she hid behind her wintry coverlet? He could hear her laughing under it, and the gaunt trees whispered endlessly some wondrous mystery of her life.

He stood for a few moments gazing intently into the moat—he could not get down to its shining surface from here—and then he turned and ran in among the towering beeches, eager to have them on every side.

The very glamour of the scene brought it more impressively home to him. We never hear Nature breathe so close to us as in the luminous, listening silence of a wind-stilled night of snow. Reinout, suddenly, heard her.

O that fairy soul-seeing, into the unreal presence of the snow-scape! It is all so actual and yet so visionary; yesterday it was not, to-morrow it will have vanished for ever. We know that it is a beautiful illusion, both of shape and colour, a dream momentarily materialised, fading away from us even as we touch it, into the hard blacks and browns of daily life—but oh the virgin purity that tempts us and escapes us, that seems to breathe in death and bid us grasp it; surely this is not the world we live and suffer in, and the glamour melts away, and it is the naked, naked world, after all. But perhaps it broke upon us as a dim foreshadowing—nay, fore-lightening—of that life in which the snow will lie upon our hearts and eyes for ever, white beneath the burning Light of God.

You smile at the thought of a boy of fourteen, with his head full of skating and the holidays, suddenly crushed beneath such an avalanche as this. It did not reach him. But he heard its voice afar off and stood vaguely listening for a moment, ere he bounded away in search of something new.

He was wild with the prospect of the ice-sports, the sleighing, the fun with his cousins, although all these,



except Topsy, were too old to play with him. Poor little fellow! He was boy enough at heart, had he but known how to show it to other boys. There was not a manly sport which he did not take to, often with a zeal far beyond his slender frame. Several times, before this wonderful acquisition of the pony, he had ridden away recklessly on anybody's horse. The Count was no equestrian.

He ran along the Holy Walk, by the merest chance, and presently was attracted to a faintly glimmering light in the distance. This drew him towards a little building, of which the door stood ajar. He stole into the Chapel. It was dark but for the lamp at the altar.

The boy stood spell-bound on the threshold. A Church, like those "at home"—Roman Catholic therefore—but full of statues and tombs. A sudden awe came over him. Was this also a dream or a reality, this conclave of the dead, in the wood? He felt terrified, and started back.

Somebody moved at the noise. Somebody else, then, was in the building. Somebody rose from his knees by the chancel and came towards Reinout, a boy like himself.

"Who are you?" asked the boy.

"Reinout van Rexelaer," replied Reinout stoutly.

"Oh, *what* a lie!"

"Say that again!" cried Reinout furiously. "How dare you? Who are *you*? I *am* Reinout van Rexelaer, from the Hague."

They could hardly distinguish each other in the dusk of the building.

"N-o-o-o," said the other boy, in long-drawn won-

der. "You don't mean to say so. Oh my eye, what luck. This comes of praying. I say, come outside. I want to ask you something. I can't ask it here."

They went out into the night together. Said the strange boy, as soon as they were outside: "Will you fight?"

"Fight?" echoed René in amazement. "No. Why?"

"I suppose you're about as old as I am. How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"That's all right. I'm thirteen; and I'm smaller. Now. Will you fight?"

"No," replied René, moving off.

"Ah, you're funk. Coward. And you won't fight because I'm not a jonker, like yourself!"

"Won't I? Look out then!" replied Reinout, and flew at his adversary.

They had a hard battle of it for a few moments under the shadow-shrouded trees. There was nobody to see fair play, but they managed honestly without. At the end of three minutes, however, Reinout had to give in; his antagonist had vanquished his superior sparring by brute force and by a vehemence which the taller boy was very far from feeling. The little noble was fairly licked.

"I've thrashed you," cried his antagonist triumphantly, "I'm glad I thrashed you." He left off pummeling René, and drew back, out of breath.

"Yes," said Reinout, wondering where his left eye was. "You have. I don't know why, I'm sure."

The other had run off. He stopped, and came

back. "Remember," he cried, "I said I was glad I'd thrashed you. Be sure and remember."

"You certainly are not a jonker," Reinout could not help retorting under this provocation. "That's not the way to end up. Here, give me your hand."

"I won't," replied Piet Poster, and scampered away.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### "JACK-SNAPS."

NEXT morning Father Bulbius drew on his stoutest boots—under Veronica's personal supervision—and marched away through the snow. "To draw on stout boots" in Dutch is to brace oneself for bold endeavour. Well, Father Bulbius drew them on and proceeded to the Castle, to pay due homage to the new Lord. The visit was not a very satisfactory one—how could it be?—in spite of Count Rexelaer's studied condescension; the good priest hung his head dejectedly, as he came away.

He had heard from Dievert that the Countess had been born a Catholic. Count Hilarius deeply regretted that this had not been the case with himself; "it would have looked so much more genuine." He would have gone over, but he dreaded inquiries into the reason, and discoveries by the Baron. Better talk about Róvert van Rexelaer. Who became a Protestant, you know.

Father Bulbius shook his head at intervals all the way home. "A renegade!" he said, thinking of the

Countess, who had remained invisible. "You cannot help being born of the devil, but you *can* help asking him to adopt you." And he sighed.

"Well?" said Veronica, waiting in the porch, her arms a-kimbo.

"You were right," replied his Reverence, "the snow is melting. It is very wet."

"But the Chapel?"

"We shall see." The Father tried to edge past her: the entrance was narrow, Veronica bony: we all know that the good Father was stout. He stuck.

"But the contract? You told him the Baron has it all in the contract?" Veronica persisted excitedly.

"I dare say the Herr Count will do all that is right. My feet are damp, Veronica; I think that I ought to change my shoes."

"So you ought to, poor lamb," cried Veronica, and hurried to fetch the slippers she had kept toasting before the fire. "I shall have to look sharp after that Chapel," she said to herself, "or they'll take it away from him yet."

The Father's sanctum now presented a very different appearance from that under which we beheld it last. It was swept and cleaned—O triumph of the Broom!—but it contained more litter than ever. For the whole room was packed full of the treasures from the Castle, massed together under the guardianship of a number of fierce-looking knights, with closed visor, who stood ranged beneath their banners, strange sight in the dwelling of a soldier of Peace. The plate-chests were in the Father's adjoining bedroom; the pictures, lords and ladies, in all their bravery of ruffs

and doublets, of wigs and powder, crowded the garret. The quiet cottage overflowed with the glory of the Rexelaers.

The Father said he slept with one eye open and dreamed of tramps. Through the door he could see the plumed knights nodding in the moonlight. He had borrowed a revolver from Dievert, but he had energetically refused to borrow the bullets as well. "Do you take me for a murderer?" he had demanded indignantly.

He had been very proud and pleased, nevertheless, when the Baron had sought admittance for his treasures on the day after the suicide. He would gladly have harboured the living Noblenesses as well as the dead ones. "Oh, not that," said the Baron. "We must never come back. We are going to live at Cleves and forget."

The deserted Castle had been bad enough; the Castle bright with unusual gaiety was worse. No longer did the Father venture to creep up the avenue, as he had done daily, before the arrival of the servants and carriages, to get a melancholy peep of the lines of closed shutters. "*Crows* they call us!" he sighed.

So he kept away, and grieved, and grew more indolent than ever. He discovered that he regretted his écarté of evenings, and this discovery involved another. It was for his own sake, then, and not for the Baron's, that he had continued to play. He did not stop to inquire what he regretted, the game or the partner. "What hypocrites we are!" he mused, and he eyed his little book of penances suspiciously, wondering how much of its contents would prove false. And one day

he impatiently threw the whole catalogue into the fire. Decidedly, adversity was improving Father Bulbius. But he pulled it off again before it was burnt. Improvement is uphill-work.

The lonely Father turned in his easy chair—oh, but it was deliciously easy!—and thought how excellent had been Veronica's fish-cake. The day was a fast-day; he had had nothing else; and he had eaten too much of it. He nodded. The fierce warriors around him seemed to nod haughtily back. He stretched out his hand to a favourite book—it was a Horace—on the floor. He found that he could not reach it, and nodded again. And the whole room slowly went to sleep.

"There's a woman to see your Reverence," said Veronica, standing in the doorway. She considered his Reverence had slept long enough. On the whole, she was very gentle to him in these days, showing her angry sympathy, like the wise woman she was, by constant abuse of those that were gone. She had seen what she had seen in the Baronial kitchen, said this excellent housekeeper. "The Baroness was always liberal," Father Bulbius would plead. "Just so," replied Veronica, ostentatiously scraping the butter-knife.

"There's a woman to see you!" she repeated aggressively.

The Father started awake. "If it's a beggar," he said, with an apprehensive frown, "send her away with a hunch of breath."

"It's not a beggar, your Reverence; it's Vrouw Poster."

The Priest's face cleared. He disliked all petitioners, because of his incapacity for saying "No." But, good man that he was, he had a good man's weakness for a chat with the fair sex, if not too alarmingly fair. "Vrouw Poster," he echoed brightly. "I'll see her here."

"Very well," replied Veronica, accentuating each syllable. She introduced the visitor, still aggressively, and, as soon as the door had closed again—too soon, therefore, for prudence—that visitor, a comely peasant woman, burst into tears.

"Good Heavens!" cried the Father. "Is Poster dead?" Simple-hearted man! All wives are doomed to weep once for their husbands! some after the husband's death, some before. If not after, then all the more before.

"No, your Reverence," sobbed the gardener's spouse. "It is Piet!"

"How shocking!" cried the Father. "How dreadfully sudden!" He rose from his chair. "Well," he said reflectively. "The boy was a good boy—on the whole."

"It's not that, your Reverence. He's not dead——"

"You said he was," interrupted the Father, annoyed. It seemed that Vrouw Poster had taken a liberty with his feelings.

"Leastways not altogether. Not that I know to the contrary. But he's run away."

"Fetch him back," said Father Bulbius, and sat down again.

"That's just what I mayn't do, your Reverence. His father says, let him stay away till he comes back of his own accord."

"Well, his father, though harsh, is not a man without sense." Bulbius began leisurely to fill his pipe, messing the tobacco over his already snuffy cassock.

"Oh your Reverence, but he won't! I know Piet. He's that dogged. Often and often he's said to me: 'Mother,' he's said, 'if father don't treat me better, I shall run away to sea.' And I used to laugh at him; the blessed Saints forgive me. But he's never been the same since the Baron went away; he was terribly partial to the Freule. And yesterday evening his father beat him for not having gone up with us to the Castle to see the new Lord come in. And this morning he's gone, and his bed's not been slept in, and he's left a paper with 'Good-bye to mother and Nicky' (that's his goat), and he's out in the snow—Oh Lord!" and the poor woman began to cry afresh.

"My dear creature," said Bulbius, considerably disturbed by these symptoms of distress, "he will doubtless return before nightfall, as soon as he has had enough of the cold. And if not, it will be easy to recapture him."

"He won't come back," sobbed Vrouw Poster. "He'd rather die on the heath. And his father's a harsh man, though I say it that shouldn't."

"No," said the Priest, gravely. "You shouldn't. Don't." He could think of nothing else to comfort her. Presently he added: "His father's lesson may do him a lot of good. He is an exceedingly mischievous boy, as we saw in that affair of the betting. Let him find out that there are worse places than home. He won't stay away long, and, meantime, you have seven other children to look after."



The woman stopped crying and stared at him. Suddenly she realized that he was childless. "Your Reverence does not understand," she said quietly, and quitted the room so abruptly that Veronica had not time to get away into the kitchen.

He called after her through the open door. His conscience smote him. "Come back," he said, "I want to understand. Now, what can I do for you, Vrouw Poster?"

"I had hoped that your Reverence would reason with my husband. The child *must* be fetched home immediately. It is wicked. It is cruel."

Just what Bulbius had dreaded, argument with a man like Poster! He gave a long pull to his pipe.

"Well, I will go with you," he said.

The Head-gardener, like many men, had no objection to pastoral exhortations, provided they were given from the pulpit, when, if unfortunately not asleep, he could hear without accepting them. Now, placed between assent and dissent, he dissented. Father Bulbius was well acquainted with his various parishioners, all the better, perhaps, for keeping a little aloof. He disliked receiving a "No" from others as much as uttering it himself. He had foreseen this refusal, and therefore he had sought to preach resignation to the gardener's wife.

"In a day or two, when he has got tired of begging for crusts, he will come back," said Piet's father, "to the best beating he ever had in his life."

But obstinate people are often mistaken, and cruel people always. Piet Poster did not come back.

His mother, therefore, was compelled to seek com-

fort in the care of her other children, as Bulbius had suggested, and the Priest went occasionally to add his equally effectual consolations, not sorry, in spite of his shrinking, to find himself once more within the well-loved precincts. He was returning late one afternoon from such a visit, in the ashen-grey December air, when his path was crossed near the vegetable garden by the new heir of the house, on his all-glorious, all-delectable pony. Reinout quickly lifted his cap. It was a little thing, but the frank grace with which it was done went straight to the good priest's heart, not a distant or a tortuous road. He was so afraid of these strangers, afraid of their inevitable dislike of himself. "A pretty pony," he said, timidly, with a ceremonious salute.

"Isn't it a beauty?" cried Reinout, only too delighted with this fresh opportunity of showing his "treasure." "I'm so glad that you like him, Mynheer. And you haven't even seen him gallop yet." "Mynheer" to the priest from a Rexelaer! Alas the day!

"Would you like to see him gallop?" suggested Reinout.

"Very much indeed, Jonker."

"Then would you mind holding this for a moment? Please keep the paper down tight, or they'll jump out. I lost one coming along, and had an awful hunt for him." And the Jonker extended a small paper-covered bowl to his new acquaintance.

Father Bulbius was preparing to take it, when a new thought struck the boy.

"Oh, perhaps, Mynheer," he said eagerly, "you could tell me what they are called." He edged up

closer, driving the Father unconsciously against a tree. "Nobody knows at home. They all say 'bugs' of everything. One of the labourers gave me these; they were in the vinery. But he says they're just beetles. Look, this is one. Take care. They pinch awfully with those little pincers. Can you tell me? I should so like to know."

Bulbius had not been a peasant boy at Deynum and afterwards a seminarist for nothing. The two heads bent over the bowl in the dim light. "Those are not beetles you have got there," he said, "but, then, the common people call most insects beetles. These are called 'Jack-Snaps' in our parts. They have got a long Latin name, I daresay, but I should have to look that out for you."

"Oh, would you? How very kind of you, Mynheer. Have you got a book, then, with all the names inside? I want to find out immensely. I am so glad to know that these are 'Jack-Snaps.' I shall tell Sam; he gave them to me. There are lots of animals in the green-houses; what a quantity there will be everywhere in summer! I had no idea there were so many in the world. It is capital fun!"

"You like being here, Jonker?" said Bulbius, a little sadly.

"Oh don't I just! It's splendid. And to-morrow all my cousins are coming! And we are going to keep Christmas. And they are going to teach me to skate!"

As he talked thus excitedly, the brown pony, which had been standing beautifully still, gave a sudden and terrific leap, almost unseating its rider. Father Bulbius

retreated with wonderful alacrity behind the tree, and peeping from thence was spectator of a struggle during which the pot and its contents were tossed away on the snow. At last, having probably freed itself from the pincers which had first caused its restlessness, the animal quieted down and Reinout triumphantly patted it, as the Father gingerly emerged.

"I *never* knew him do that before," said the young master reproachfully, and the pony unfortunately could not explain. "But oh the Jack-Snaps! I must find them!" And he leaped to the ground and began eagerly hunting in the snow.

It was almost dark. The Father struck match after match in the wind-still air, and bent his burly figure as best he could. They searched together, but vainly. "It can't be helped," gasped the Father at last. "You must get Sam to find you some more animals, Jonker, and if you come to my Parsonage, I'll tell you their names."

"I'm so sorry to have lost these," said Reinout, "and, besides, they will die in the cold." He rode off soberly. The Father watched his figure disappear into the evening mist. "No," said the Father aloud, "it could never be done. Besides, mixed marriages are a very great evil. But a nice boy, nevertheless. A really nice boy."

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

## REINOUT'S COUSINS.

NEXT afternoon Reinout went down to the little station with a couple of carriages, and all the Rexelaers van Altena were let loose out of the crowded Christmas train and came driving back with the young heir through the startled village. The village was very much interested. The former lords had lived in the silence of an approaching dissolution; the curtain had now risen for another and a brighter play. The village criticised the smart town carriages and the smart town ladies, and the liveries and the horseflesh, especially the horseflesh. It still said "Well!" but the tone was sinking from doubt to content. Jaap Hakkert, the butcher, agreed with the two bakers that a full table and a full purse at the table had their advantages. The tailor smiled. And the oldest inhabitant said that things reminded him of the Baron's father's father's time.

Thys looked into his Lise's eyes. "Do you remember," he asked, "how hard pressed the Baron was when he refused to sell the Chalkhouse Farm?"

"Of course, Thys; we all remember," said Lise. Thys was Lise's cousin, as well as her lover. He had lived all his life at the Chalkhouse Farm.

Count Rexelaer's younger brother Frederick, as everybody knows, had married a daughter of the great Gelderland family of Borck, a cousin of that powerful Baron Borck of Rollingen whose estate joined on to Deynum. The lady had brought her husband a little money and a number of influential connections. He

was a quiet, insignificant, sat-upon little man, a member of the magistrature and an utter failure as a lawyer. But he played whist very well. And she was comfortable and florid, and managed everybody and everything. You got on excellently with her if you said "Yes" in the pauses of her talk. They made Frederick van Rexelaer a judge before he was forty. Her cousin R—— was minister at the time.

"My dear Betsy," his Excellency had said, suddenly surrendering after a long tussle, "as you have got his name proposed—Heaven only knows how you managed it!—I will appoint him in spite of——"

"Thank you, Herman, that is like you——"

"Superior claims. But on one condition only. He must solemnly bind himself to me *never* on any account to express a separate opinion. He must always 'concur' with his colleagues.\* You understand me. I can have no awkward questions cropping up."

"I understand perfectly," replied Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck. "I promise."

"But I would rather have his own word bind him——"

"Really?" said Mevrouw with a peculiar smile. "Well, of course you know best. I am much obliged to you, Herman. You are the best friend we have."

But she had more best friends. The judge faithfully kept his promise, and he found it very easy to keep. And they knew the right people, whom to know renders utter misery impossible. Besides, they were anything but miserable, although they experienced some difficulty about always making both ends meet

\* Verdicts, in Holland, are pronounced by juries of judges.

exactly in the manner they wanted. She liked children. She liked managings. And he liked whist.

And the five children, as they grew up, liked themselves, which is always a great advantage. And they liked their mother's numerous relations—a rarer coincidence—and their large circle of acquaintances. Of course they all believed, heart and soul, in the Greatness of the Rexelaers, and tried to forget that the brand-new title of this branch was not—officially, at least—a revival of the Holy Roman one. Grandmamma Rexelaer (the haberdasher's daughter) had never existed at all. Grandmamma Borck was alive, and a very great lady indeed.

The chief event of these good people's life had been the arrival from foreign parts of the head of the family with his wife and his olive-coloured cherub and all their delicious, if rather disquieting, paraphernalia of foreignness. And the Rexelaer liveries once more shone in the streets of a city of flunkies, and the lion's-paws stretched forth their swords from the panels of the Creole Countess's brand-new carriages—*ipsa glorior infamia*—and her family arose and called her blessed. The children were rather disappointed about her colour. Rolline, the younger girl, had long identified her aunt with her nigger-doll Jumbo; Jane, the elder, avowed a preference for *café au lait*. Margherita was not a bit like Jumbo. She was very handsome, and the whole family talked, in public, of her beauty alone.

"My dear," said the venerable Baroness Borck to her daughter, "I asked Madame de Jercelyn about the Cachenard family. She said she had never heard the name. And there, I think, we had better stop."

There were five young Rexelaers van Altena—where is Altena?—two sons, Guy and George, the younger just out of his teens, and after these three daughters, Jane, Rolline and Antoinette. They were all golden-haired and good-looking and stupid, except Jane, who was sharp of features and of soul. Guy was at Leyden preparing to follow his father's career with all his father's chances of success; George, the beauty, foolish, good-natured, Apollo-faced George, was nowhere, everlastingly plucked in the A B C. "George will have to marry," said Grandmamma Borck. The girls, too, would have to marry, though what could anyone make of plain-featured, plain-spoken Jane? They were always well-dressed, and they were "altogether English," which means that they spoke Dutch with an English accent and English with a Dutch one. That was the proper thing among their "set" at the Hague, and you must on no account make use of any language but English in public places and conveyances, and very nice it would be if the Nemesis of Pronunciation did not infallibly rise and mock you. And the Freules van Rexelaer never wrote other than English notes to their intimates, and, if they wanted to be particularly affectionate and undyingly faithful, they signed them—"yours truly"! Yes, they were very English, indeed.

Reinout's especial friend, twelve-year old Antoinette, therefore felt much aggrieved at the French name she bore. She had been called after the wife of the minister who had given her father the judgeship, and she went about as a living monument of gratitude. To comfort her, the others had dubbed her Topsy, and the nickname suited her; she was a shock-headed tomboy



in those days. She had been wild to get to all the glories which Reinout had graphically foretold. Almost before the train had stopped, she plumped, past her cousin's extended hand, down on the platform, flinging her arms round the retriever's neck. "Prince first," she said, looking up, with all a child's precocious coquetry, at her "preux chevalier."

Mevrouw Elizabeth ascended the castle-steps with stately smile. She never worried her children, leaving all these things to governesses and to time. Her heart, at this moment, was full of the bitter sweet of the first visit to Deynum. The whole family rejoiced and envied. "The home of our fathers!" Up till now the only real sorrow in the life of this daughter of the Borcks had been the harrowing conviction that the entire city of the Hague was constantly conscious of the distinction between real Rexelaers and false. Most people in the Hague, had she but known it, were thinking, as she did, of themselves.

There had been some trouble about getting away, at this time of the year, from Grandmamma Borck. That wonderful old lady had originally taken but very little interest in her daughter's common husband's still more common sister-in-law. She took no great interest in anything nowadays, excepting the dual contentment—culinary and conversational—of that active member, her tongue. She lived to eat (little, but well), and to talk (well, but much). And she had managed to preserve her figure. And she liked tyrannizing over a rich orphan grand-child, whose money supported them both.

She woke up to a firework of questions, however, when the great news of the inheritance suddenly fell

with a hiss on a hundred spluttering tongues. Mevrouw Elizabeth, who faithfully visited her mother at least three times a week, now had to go daily, and tell all she knew. A little more, under the pressure of much questioning and progressive irritability.

"Of course I remember the Marquis la Jolais at Brussels," coughed the Dowager over her laced handkerchief and scent-bottle by the blazing fire. "He was handsome, though a little bit of a dandy. They used to call him the Marquis J'ose. He was very courteous to women, but then everybody was that in those days. Don't ring, Cécile. Put on the coals yourself. And to think that this little no-one-knows-who should be his niece! I remember all about the affair with the groom and the business at Rio. Leave the room, Cécile, and your aunt and I can talk it over again."

"Yes, grandmamma," answered Cécile demurely, where she knelt, tongs in hand, a pretty figure, before the fire. "Grandmamma and you are quits," Topsy Rexelaer used to say. "Each makes life as hot as she can for the other." Grandmamma was cold-blooded and exceedingly "frileuse"; Cécile was warm-hearted and chilled.

"They are wanting us to go and spend Christmas with them," Mevrouw Elizabeth began a little hesitatingly. "It would be good fun for the children, in spite of Margherita's affectation of grief. She has gone into mourning, Mamma, preposterous mourning, an extra inch for each additional nought of the legacy. She makes a fool of herself. You remember how everybody laughed at Clara van Weylert's crape."

"I do," said the Dowager grimly, "and I remember

the joke about the additional inch; it was Dolly Weylert made it. You ought to bring me some new jokes, instead of spoiling old ones in the telling. I go out so little; I hear nothing. I often wish I was dead."

Mevrouw van Rexelaer knew what this meant. "We won't go to Deynum, unless you like," she said. And then she added with her ready tact: "The children will feel it's their duty to stay and cheer up grand-mamma. You always get miserable at this time of the year."

The Dowager angrily shook off her daughter's arm. "Cécile can dress me a tree," she said, "with bonbons and a doll! Wait till you are my age and Jane tells you to feel young. I shall be thankful to know you are all revelling at Deynum without any trouble to me. To a woman, after seventy, life is a humiliation and a disgrace. There, there, I am tired."

Mevrouw Elizabeth rose with a sensation of relief. Poor Mamma! Her gout, you know! And the festive season. "It is a great responsibility for Hilarius," she said, "this large property. And Margherita is hardly the woman——"

"Fiddlesticks! I daresay she will give away soup tickets. Tell Cécile, as you go out, to bring me up my bouillon."

END OF VOL. I.

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